



SACRED HEART NEWSLETTER

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A Quarterly Newsletter on Devotion to the Sacred Heart

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“Hearts on Fire” Retreats Draw Thousands across America to a New Living Faith

A new generation of Jesuits – new inspiration – new ways to set hearts on fire. That’s exactly the idea behind the popular one or two-day retreats called “Hearts on Fire” created several years ago by young American Jesuits. These retreats are built on the dynamic challenge of the Sacred Heart devotion. They have already drawn many hundreds of people, mainly young adults, in each of some 26 cities of the United States and Canada.

Local Sponsorship

A schedule of retreats in different cities is drawn up each year—all sponsored by a local host institution. They are advertised around the area and attract persons looking for religious inspiration and guidance in their lives. Groups of five young Jesuits—a kind of “mission band” of priests and seminarians—welcome the retreatants, sit down and talk with them, give several religious presentations based on the

Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, and provide an opportunity for confession and Mass. These retreats typically attract about 100 persons.

One or Two-Day Retreats

“Hearts on Fire” retreats are usually held at a local college or in another Catholic or Christian facility. In retreats spanning two days, the retreatants return home at night and come back the next morning. Light snacks are available. No charge is involved. In the evening, coffee-house refreshments and live music are provided. The presentations feature a series of themes roughly following the process of an Ignatian retreat. One of the talks deals just with the topic of prayer.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin was the site of the first “Hearts on Fire” retreat in June 2010. Since that time, some 33 retreats have been given in various cities from New York to Regina, Saskatchewan. Ten or eleven retreats are scheduled each year, accordingly to

“Hearts on Fire” Retreats (cont’d)

the availability of the young Jesuits, who are characteristically engaged in teaching or the study of philosophy or theology.

The “Hearts on Fire” retreat program is the brain child of Fr. Phil Hurley, S.J., currently Youth and Young Adult Director, Apostleship of Prayer National

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Persons engaged in these “Hearts on Fire” experiences have spoken enthusiastically about the effect on their lives. One said: “I felt like I did more personal growth in one day than I have done on a three-day retreat. It was exactly what I needed!”

Consecration of the Human Race to the Sacred Heart

(Appropriate to the Feast of Christ the King)

Most sweet Jesus, Redeemer of the human race,
look down upon us, humbly prostrate before Your altar.
We are yours and yours we wish to be;
but to be more surely united with you, behold each one of us
freely consecrates himself today to your most Sacred Heart.

Many, indeed, have never known you;
many too, despising your precepts, have rejected you.
Have mercy on them all, most merciful Jesus,
and draw them to your Sacred Heart.

May you be King, O Lord,
not only of the faithful who have never forsaken you,
but also of the prodigal children who have abandoned you;
grant that they may quickly return to your Father's house,
lest they die of wretchedness and hunger.

Be King of those who are deceived by erroneous opinions,
or whom discord keeps aloof,
and call them back to the harbour of truth and unity of faith,
so that soon there may be but one flock and one shepherd.

Be King also of all those who sit
in the ancient superstition of the Gentiles,
and refuse not to deliver them out of darkness
into the light and kingdom of God.

Grant, O Lord, to Your Church,
assurance of freedom and immunity from harm;
give peace and order to all nations,
and make the Earth resound from pole to pole with one cry:

Praise to the divine Heart that wrought our salvation;
to it be glory and honour forever. Amen.

(Pope Leo XIII, *Annum Sacrum*, 1899)

Devotion to the Sacred Heart – The First Millennium

Many look to the medieval era and the period following Our Lord's revelations to St. Margaret Mary as the beginning of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but the authors of the comprehensive work *Devotion to the Heart of Jesus* (Rome: Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, 1982) tell us that "a careful reading of the Fathers [of the first millennium] will show that the essential principles of the devotion were alive in the Church from its inception."

The key text noted by the earliest authors is in John, chapter 7:

On the last day, the great day of the festival, Jesus stood and cried out: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink! As scripture says, 'From his heart shall flow streams of living water.'" (John 7:37-38)

The Jerusalem Bible notes that the oldest tradition held that Jesus was saying that these streams of living water would flow from Christ's own Heart. The Jesuit Hugo Rahner said that "Fathers and theologians from Augustine (354-430) and Cyril of Jerusalem (350-387) to Peter Canisius (1521-1597) speak of the living waters as taking their source in the side of Christ." (Stierli in *Heart of the Savior*, p. 58) Even earlier, St. Justin Martyr (†c.165) spoke of these living waters as streaming out of the side of Christ as from a rock. St. Irenaeus of Lyon (c.150-202) and St. Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170-230) both follow Justin's reading of this text. St. Cyprian (†258) says, "The Lord invites [persons] to come and drink from the stream of living water which flows from his bosom."

A later tradition, stemming from Origen (184-253), would rely on a different interpretation of this passage and hold that the streams of living water would flow, not from Jesus, but from the believer. Many patristic voices spoke out for this other

reading of the text, and that reading appears to have prevailed in the first millennium.

Many Church Fathers (Cyprian, Chrysostom, Augustine, others) see the origin of the Church as represented in the flow of living waters from the side of Christ following his death. This notion suggests the close relation between the Church and the graces of the Heart of Christ.

Ambrose (339-387), Chrysostom (347-c.407), Augustine (354-430) and others saw John the evangelist drawing divine gifts of wisdom as he reclined on the bosom of Christ. As Augustine said: "Here he drinks of the deep secrets of the Savior."

As the implications of Jesus being both God and man became clear, Hippolytus (170-223) would find in the humanity of Christ's love the strongest argument of God's love for man. Others discovered with a new richness the great human qualities of the God-Man, the virtues he manifested to all who knew him. Augustine saw all the treasures of Christ's wisdom and knowledge summed up in the fact that he was meek and humble of heart.

Seven hundred years later, St. Bernard (1090-1153) would write: "The secret of this Heart is opened by the wounds of the body, and thence is shown to us the great sacrament of his goodness . . . How, O Lord, could we see more clearly than by your wounds that you are filled with goodness and sweetness, abounding in mercy?"

His follower, St. William of Thierry (†c.1150) declared:

"The riches of your glory, Lord, were hidden in the heaven of your mysterious being until the soldier opened the side of our Lord and Savior on the cross. Thence came the sacraments of our devotion, so that we have but to touch the side, as Thomas did, and enter into his Heart."

The flowering of these ideas into the mystical experiences of religious in the middle ages will be discussed in a subsequent issue of the Newsletter. At the same time, we will see that increased stress on the humanity of Christ will draw devout souls into compassionate union with Christ in his suffering.

Karl Rahner on the Rich Meaning of the Words “Sacred Heart”

In his treatise “The Theological Meaning of the Veneration of the Sacred Heart”, Karl Rahner says if we seek for a word that will epitomise and unify “[the Church’s devotion to the Sacred Heart] and her theology as the immeasurable fullness of the reality of Christ. ... it is difficult to imagine that we shall be able to find any other word which has this evocative and epitomizing force within it except the word ‘heart’. . . . Where then is another word, apart from this word, the ‘Sacred Heart’, which ... unifies and brings into man’s interior soul the fullness of him whom it designates in this sense? There is no other word.”

“[This word (the Sacred Heart)] has the function of designating that point at which the mystery of man passes into the mystery of God. The infinite emptiness which lies at the innermost center of man cries out to be filled with the infinite fullness of God. ... What is designated in this word is that which signifies a love which is selfless and beyond all conception, the love which is victorious in failure, which triumphs when it is deprived of its power, raises to life when it has been slain. It is the love that is God.”

“The word ‘heart’ would be reduced to an empty formula, utterly drained of the meaning and content it once had if we did not constantly renew our search of the scriptures, using our quiet hours to meditate upon, and preaching by word of mouth the truths which the Christian message contains. But in this we cannot always be speaking explicitly about the heart.

“The word which refers to the heart of Christ retains its force and its unique function only on condition that we have not already used it to excess in a spirit of exaggerated and unbalanced ‘pietism’ by employing it in all cases in which we have occasion to speak of Jesus Christ. This word should be uttered and invoked by us only in those cases in which we need to refer to the ‘heart’ of man precisely in the sense of that interior and hidden ‘self’ (cf. Romans 7:22, 1 Pet 3:4, Eph 3:16 ff.), that is in *him* (in virtue of his unfathomable fullness) and in *us* (in virtue of our emptiness and dissipation of spirit).”

“Key words such as ‘heart’ in Sacred Heart are meant to open up “the inexpressible mystery

of God (in our case, that God who is the Absolute of inconceivability is brought near to us in love). ... The term ‘Sacred Heart’ stands for that reality in which the unnamable mystery which we call God is made present to us as compassionate and self-bestowing proximity (instead of as one who withholds himself from us in silence and refuses us). This mystery is made present to us where we are in that which is the *fons et origo* of our earthly being, in the heart.”

Rahner wants to be sure that “the word that stands for the Sacred Heart is not reduced to one among many other words which we use in our everyday religious parlance. We can use this word only sparingly. ... we must use it in such a way that the word thus sparingly used may only be ‘understood’ in this especially exalted sense; this is the sense in which we shall learn to understand all the words of faith only when the eternal light shines upon us with all its brilliance unimpeded.” (*Theological Investigations* VIII, 217-228)

Rahner:

On the Encyclical *Haureatis Aquas* (1956)

“When a dogmatic theologian is called upon to speak of the veneration of the Sacred Heart from the point of view of his particular discipline, he can, in a certain sense, make it easier for himself to do so simply by referring to Pius XII’s great encyclical *Haureatis Aquas*, of 15th May, 1956. This contains a particularly comprehensive treatment of the subject, one that goes beyond those of Leo XIII and Pius XI, and includes everything connected with this particular devotion.”

In the Words of the Encyclical

“It is altogether impossible to enumerate the heavenly gifts which devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus has poured out on the souls of the faithful, purifying them, offering them heavenly strength, rousing them to the attainment of all virtues. ... We are perfectly justified in seeing in this same devotion ... a gift without price which our divine Savior the Incarnate Word ... imparted to the Church.” (#2)