

# A Matter of the Heart



Meditations on  
the Sacred Heart of Jesus  
and the Consecrated Life

By Rev. James Kubicki, S.J.

Introduction by Raymond L. Cardinal Burke

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*Dedicated to my parents,  
Frank and Florence Kubicki—the seedbed of my vocation.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels effects a profound union with Christ in Whom the consecrated person offers her life *totally* to God the Father for the salvation of man and the world. The consecrated life is truly the total union of heart with the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus; it is the daily placing of all one's heart into the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus. The profound union with Christ of the consecrated life finds a most apt expression in devotion to His Sacred Heart. For indeed the call to the consecrated life comes from the Heart of Jesus and the grace to respond to the call is found solely in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

At the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, “[o]n the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out:

If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me; let him drink who believes in Me. Scripture has it: “From within him rivers of living water shall flow” (Jn 7:37-38).

Our Lord's invitation is issued to all but, in a particular way, to those called to the consecrated life.

Our devotion is to the pierced Heart of Christ on the Cross which is now His glorious Heart in His glorious body from which the grace of the Holy Spirit, the “living water,” flows forth for the life of the Church. The devotion to the Sacred Heart keeps before our eyes the reality of our redemption accomplished by the suffering, death and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus and made really present for us in the Church, especially in the celebration of the Sacraments. Through devotion to the Sacred Heart, we see more deeply that the Sacraments

are divine actions by which Our Lord Jesus continues His redemptive work in our midst, that they are signs rooted in the abiding reality of the life of Christ, in His Passion, Death and Resurrection.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart increases especially our love of the Holy Eucharist, both in action in the Sacrifice of the Mass and in repose in the abiding presence of the Body of Christ in the tabernacle. From His pierced Heart, Christ opened up the whole font of grace for the Church but, most of all, the gift of His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity as the spiritual food of our earthly journey and the pledge of eternal life with the Father when our life pilgrimage reaches its eternal destination. In the blood flowing from the pierced Heart of Christ we are drawn to the reality of His gift of Himself to us in the Eucharistic Species. Receiving the gift of His true Body and Blood, we are enriched and strengthened to offer our life with Him for the salvation of the world.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus helps consecrated persons to draw those for whom they pray and whom they serve to the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus in which they will find rest, refreshment and new strength for their daily living. Consecrated persons, both contemplative and apostolic, are heralds through whom Our Lord issues His invitation to all:

Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For My yoke is easy and My burden light (Mt 11:28-30).

In a most particular way, consecrated persons participate in Christ's thirst for souls (cf. Jn 19:28).

Devotion to the Sacred Heart assists the consecrated person in the transformation of his or her own heart in conformity with the Heart of Jesus. Love for Christ in the outpouring of

His life for us necessarily leads the consecrated person to an ever more generous living of his or her vocation, the total gift of self to the Father in following Christ, the poor, the chaste and the obedient One. What is most important for consecrated persons is that they know the immeasurable and unceasing love of God, flowing out from the pierced Heart of Jesus, and be “rivers of living water,” for all their brothers and sisters. Their service can address the various needs of the community and of the apostolate, but only their rest and refreshment in the Heart of Jesus can satisfy the deeper needs of all their brothers and sisters in the Church: to know, in the fullest sense of the word, God’s unconditional love for them.

Leading souls to the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus, the consecrated person will lead souls to return love to the pierced Heart of Christ and to make reparation for sins committed against His love. Certainly, in our day, when so many have grown cold in their love of our Lord Jesus and His Church, the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the lives of consecrated persons is an irreplaceable help to hearts, that they be once again devout, ready to do God’s will in all things.

Intimately connected to the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the Apostleship of Prayer, indicated to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque after the death of her spiritual director, St. Claude de la Columbière. Through the Apostleship of Prayer, consecrated persons bring the rest and refreshment, the unity and love of the Sacred Heart, to the whole world. They unite their prayers, joys and sufferings to Christ for the salvation of the world. The Morning Offering flows from the communion in Christ’s Sacrifice through daily participation in the Holy Mass. At the same time, each morning, it anticipates that most perfect, indeed sacramental, union of hearts with the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Through daily participation in the Holy Eucharist, the prayers and needs of all our brothers and sisters—which we offer to the Father by the Morning Offering—are placed on the paten



with the host which becomes the Body of Christ. The practice of the Morning Offering helps the consecrated person to understand the truth about his or her life and apostolate—that he or she belongs to God in Christ and that the apostolate is His work in Christ.

The Servant of God Rev. Walter J. Ciszek, S.J., who was imprisoned in the Soviet Union under the regime of Joseph Stalin and suffered greatly in remaining faithful to his vocation, found a wonderful source of grace in the Apostleship of Prayer. He gives testimony to this in his book, *He Leadeth Me*. Rev. Herbert Smith, S.J., describes the extraordinary grace which came to Father Ciszek through the habit of the Morning Offering:

Father Ciszek experienced day after day that saying the Morning Offering helped him see the profound truth about God's will for his life. Offering his own sacrifices with the sacrifice of the Mass gave them meaning. He found out that hopelessness came from injecting too much of self into life. It was his experience that we worry too much about what we can or cannot do, but *we can do God's will*, and doing that restores hope (Herbert F. Smith, S.J., *Homilies on the Heart of Jesus and the Apostleship of Prayer*, p. xxv).

Offering ourselves to the Father in the Heart of Jesus, we become, with our faults and all the limitations of our situation, a sign of the holiness of God; we make visible the merciful love of God. The Morning Offering is a fundamental way by which consecrated persons fulfill their call to be a sign of hope to all.

In his book, *A Matter of the Heart: Meditations on the Sacred Heart and the Consecrated Life*, Rev. James Kubicki, S.J., offers spiritual reflections to encourage consecrated persons to configure their lives after the Heart of Jesus, that is, to develop an intimate “Heart-to-heart” relationship with Our Lord, so that they can be perfectly formed in His image and likeness. I am confident

that Father Kubicki's meditations will assist consecrated persons to love the Lord with "an undivided heart," and so help to bring about the Reign of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in the lives of many in our world. Uniting their hearts daily to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, consecrated persons will be, ever more, the visible signs of God's merciful love to the world. Placing their hearts each day anew into the glorious Heart of Jesus, their hearts will become fountains of the living water of His merciful love.

It is my firm hope that Father Kubicki's meditations will inspire consecrated persons to find their rest and their strength in the only fountain of their vocation, the Sacred Heart of Jesus. May his meditations help us all, according to our vocation in life, to be one in heart with the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus. May St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and St. Claude de Columbière intercede for us, so that we may grow in our devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and so live more fully and perfectly in Christ.

—His Eminence Raymond L. Cardinal Burke  
Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura



## CHAPTER ONE

# LOVING WITH THE HEART OF JESUS

Loving with the Heart of Jesus! Who can deny that our ultimate calling is to love with the Heart of Jesus?

A few years ago I got some insight into how we might attain this goal. I was reading a book called *In the Footsteps of Jesus* by Bruce Marchiano, an actor who played the role of Jesus in “The Gospel According to Matthew” in a series called *The Visual Bible*.

Marchiano described how he approached playing the role of Jesus. Like any good actor, he knew he had to get into the mind and heart of his character. He could not approach a scene merely thinking to himself, “What would Jesus do here?” He had to become the character he was playing. To do that he had to get into Jesus’ point of view, His attitudes, thoughts and feelings. In Marchiano’s words:

It’s essential for an actor to grasp the character’s point of view. The world looks different to different people and therein lies the difference in people’s reactions and sensitivities. A good example is two people looking at the same homeless person. One’s heart is broken, the other’s gets annoyed, resulting in two very different responses.<sup>1</sup>

### **Journey from the Head to the Heart**

So how exactly did Marchiano seek to enter into the point of view of Jesus Christ, the Son of God? Here’s what he said:

My acting coach, Al Ruscio, used to quote the saying, “The journey from the head to the heart is a journey of a

thousand miles.” Somehow I knew it was that journey that had to be taken before the cameras rolled, so that was the specific focus of my prayer—a prayer that, for the first time in my life, went like this: “Lord, show me what it all looks like through Your eyes.”<sup>22</sup>

And so Marchiano prayed for the grace to see and feel what Jesus would have seen and felt. As he describes it, that grace was given to him in a flash. He entered into the human and divine Heart of Jesus and felt all its human emotion with divine intensity. He described the experience like this:

Everyone was swarming around me, paying no attention. I was pacing and praying and looking over the tide of faces, “Lord, show me what it all looks like through Your eyes.” This is where it gets difficult because I don’t have words to describe what happened in the next moment.

It was so fast—just a fraction of a second—and I’m convinced the reason it was so quick was that the Lord was protecting me. And what I “saw” in that moment was not with my eyes—it was something in my heart. And the only way I can put it into words is to say it was a sea of people living lives in ways He didn’t plan. People living lives away from His love, away from His care; outside of His goodness, His embrace, His plans, purposes and hopes for them.

It was so awful a thing—I don’t have words to describe to you how incredibly awful it was. I remember when it happened, it was as if the wind got knocked out of me; I couldn’t breathe, and my heart just broke. It broke on a level I never knew existed, and I just started shaking and weeping....

For the first time in my life, I understood what the word “compassion” means when it comes to Jesus Christ. I understood that it isn’t just a feeling sorry for people; it’s a heartbreak so intense, so deep it’s like your gut is getting ripped open. It is a heartbreak that screams in utter agony for the

needless, pointless pain of people—people who need only turn to Him. What I felt that day was so incredibly tragic. And there can be no doubt what I tasted was just a drop of water in the oceans of the universe compared to what it truly feels like for Him.<sup>3</sup>

### **Being Configured to Christ**

Like Marchiano, our goal is to enter into the mind and heart of Jesus Christ, to be, in the terminology of the Church, configured to Christ. We desire to love with the Heart of Christ, not just for a short period of time while we act a role, but always, permanently, every day of our lives. This configuration, this transformation, is what Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, calls "Loving with the heart of Christ" (no. 75).

To be configured to Christ means to live in union with His Heart and to love as He loves—the Father and all of His children for whom Jesus suffered and died. Configured to Christ means having the love of God at the center of our being so that all our thoughts, feelings, words and deeds radiate from that fiery core. Configured to Christ means being set apart and being totally committed—consecrated—to God's purpose of calling each human being into a spousal relationship. Like the heart which pumps the life blood into every part of the body, so the hearts of consecrated people—configured to the Heart of Jesus and loving with His Heart—send eternal life and love through the Body of Christ and into the world.

At the beginning of *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II wrote: "In every age there have been men and women who, obedient to the Father's call and to the prompting of the Spirit, have chosen this special way of following Christ, in order to devote themselves to Him with an 'undivided heart'"(no. 1). This is a reference to 1 Corinthians 7:34. There is only one truly "undivided heart"—the Heart of Jesus. Being devoted to this Heart is essential for living the consecrated life with authenticity.

## **The Pierced Heart of Jesus**

From the first centuries of the Church, devotion to the Wounded Heart of Jesus has been essential. Pope Benedict XVI continued that tradition. In 2006 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Pope Pius XII's great Sacred Heart encyclical *Haurietis Aquas*, Pope Benedict wrote a letter to the then-General Superior of the Jesuits, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, concluding as follows:

Therefore gazing on the "side pierced by the lance," in which shines God's boundless will for salvation, cannot be considered a passing form of cult or devotion: the adoration of God's love, which has found its historical-devotional expression in the symbol of the "pierced heart," remains absolutely necessary for a living relationship with God.<sup>4</sup>

If devotion to the pieced heart of Jesus is urged upon all the faithful, how much more essential is it for a consecrated person who is called to follow Christ wholeheartedly "by conforming one's whole existence to Christ..."<sup>5</sup>

This is the meaning of the vows:

The evangelical counsels, by which Christ invites some people to share His experience as the chaste, poor and obedient one, call for and make manifest in those who accept them an explicit desire to be totally conformed to Him.<sup>6</sup>

## **"Heart Knowledge" Needed**

Ultimately such conformity is a matter of the heart. It begins with "heart knowledge" of God's deep personal love. It is not enough for a consecrated person to have head knowledge about Jesus. Each of us is called to a deep heart-to-Heart relationship with Jesus, to come to know Him intimately. This is the knowledge that transforms hearts and configures consecrated people more closely to Jesus, one day at a time.

But remember what Marchiano the actor did to enter into heart knowledge of Jesus: he prayed. And God favored him with

an encounter with the very Heart of Jesus. Prayer is essential for those called to a closer configuration to Christ. Prayer is so much more than reading about Jesus in the Gospels and then going out and trying to imitate Him. Imitation asks the question “What would Jesus do?” We pray for configuration, to be drawn into a living relationship with Jesus so that we share His attitudes, values, desires, thoughts and feelings. It leads us to say each day ever more authentically, as Saint Paul put it, “Now I live, not I, but Christ” (Gal 2:20). As our hearts are gradually configured to the Heart of Jesus, they beat in unison with His, as did the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We pray that our two hearts—Jesus’ Heart and our own hearts—may beat as one in their love of the Father and His love for every human being.

As we have seen, devotion to the Sacred Heart is not one devotion among many, nor the particular charism of a few, but an essential element of the Christian life. The actual expressions of this devotion—the artistic representations and prayers—vary widely, depending upon personal practice and cultural preference. Yet devotion to the Heart of Jesus is not simply an option for those chosen to be configured to Christ. For how could anyone be configured to Christ without His Heart?





## CHAPTER TWO

# “I WILL GIVE YOU A NEW HEART”

Consecrated persons are called to be closely configured to Christ as He Himself was totally consecrated to His Father and His Father’s will. Though Saint Paul expressed his own consecration in these words, “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20), this was not an obliteration of himself but the transforming union of himself with Jesus Christ. We can do this through “the source and summit of the Christian life,” the Holy Eucharist.<sup>1</sup> Only this Most Holy Sacrament can change us poor, weak sinners into saints, configured to Christ, living icons of Jesus for today’s world. It is through this Sacrament of Love that we receive a new mind and heart capable of thinking, feeling and loving as Jesus did.

Confronting the hard-hearted sinfulness of the Chosen People, the Prophet Ezekiel proclaimed a great promise. He spoke God’s word to exiled Israel before the vision of the dry bones:

I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by My statutes, careful to observe My decrees (Ez 36:26-27).

This prophecy of a new heart is fulfilled in the Heart of Christ. Only in Jesus can we find a natural human Heart capable of loving the Father with every thought, word and deed. His is a Heart filled to overflowing with the love of God for every human being created in the divine image, made for a

nuptial union with God. His is the Heart that can beat within us and empower us to follow Jesus more closely in chastity, poverty and obedience. This new Heart—the Sacred Heart of Jesus—is given to us in the Most Holy Eucharist.

### **The Presence of the “Whole Christ”**

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, quoting the Council of Trent, states: “In the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist ‘the Body and Blood, together with the Soul and Divinity, of Our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained*’” (no. 1374).

Because Jesus is totally present, His Most Sacred Heart is present in the Eucharist. Pope John Paul II wrote of this beautifully in his apostolic letter for the Year of the Eucharist:

There is a particular need to cultivate *a lively awareness of Christ’s Real Presence*, both in the celebration of Mass and in the worship of the Eucharist outside Mass.... The presence of Jesus in the tabernacle must be a kind of *magnetic pole* attracting an ever greater number of souls enamored of Him, ready to wait patiently to hear His voice, and, as it were, to sense the beating of His heart.<sup>3</sup>

When we come to Eucharistic adoration, we place ourselves in the Presence of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus. Like Saint John at the Last Supper, we draw near and rest on His Heart, drawing strength for the challenges and trials that we will face.

But even more, when we receive Holy Communion, Jesus’ Sacred Heart and our own heart become one, even in a nuptial sense. In the Holy Eucharist we receive the new heart God promised through Ezekiel, the Heart of the only Son of God. Jesus gives us the heart that can follow God’s law. His Heart united to ours transforms ours and configures us more closely to Christ.

### **The Transforming Power of the Eucharist**

In 2005 Pope Benedict XVI spoke eloquently about the transforming power of the Eucharist. The Holy Father said:

Yesterday evening we came together in the presence of the Sacred Host, in which Jesus becomes for us the bread that sustains and feeds us, and there we began our inner journey of adoration. In the Eucharist, adoration must become union.

By making the bread into His Body and the wine into His Blood, He anticipates His death, He accepts it in His heart, and He transforms it into an action of love. What on the outside is simply brutal violence—the Crucifixion—from within becomes an act of total self-giving love. This is the substantial transformation that was accomplished at the Last Supper and was destined to set in motion a series of transformations leading ultimately to the transformation of the world when God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28).

To use an image well known to us today, this is like inducing nuclear fission in the very heart of being—the victory of love over hatred, the victory of love over death. Only this intimate explosion of good conquering evil can then trigger the series of transformations that little by little will change the world.

All other changes remain superficial and cannot save. For this reason we speak of Redemption: what had to happen at the most intimate level has indeed happened, and we can enter into its dynamic. Jesus can distribute His Body, because He truly gives Himself.

This first fundamental transformation of violence into love, of death into life, brings other changes in its wake. Bread and wine become His Body and Blood.

But it must not stop there; on the contrary, the process of transformation must now gather momentum. The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the Body of Christ, His own Flesh and Blood.

We all eat the one bread, and this means that we ourselves become one. In this way, adoration, as we said earlier, be-

comes union. God no longer simply stands before us as the One who is totally Other. He is within us, and we are in Him.<sup>4</sup>

Pope Benedict's words are echoed in Preface VII for Sunday Mass:

Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God. For You so loved the world that in Your mercy You sent us a Redeemer, to live like us in all things but sin, so that You might love in us what You loved in Your Son, by whose obedience we have been restored to those gifts of Yours that, by sinning, we had lost in disobedience.

How is this possible? How can we be so configured to Christ? Through the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus.

At the moment of the Incarnation, the Eternal Word of the Father took flesh. Within twenty-one days of His conception, the physical heart of the Son of God began to beat. In the womb of the Virgin Mary a marriage took place: the marriage of humanity and divinity. Now God loved with a heart that was human and divine. With each celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Word becomes flesh again and opens His Heart in a complete act of self-giving love. Because He unites His Heart to ours in Holy Communion, we now have a new heart configured to His, united to His Sacred Heart. He gives Himself to us so that we may be one with Him and able to say "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me."

### **The Need for Our Cooperation**

The transforming power of the Eucharist is not automatic. It requires our cooperation and devotion. Saint Paul tells the Corinthians, "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the Body and Blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27).

Jesus told the great saint of the Sacred Heart, St. Margaret Mary, to ask for reparation for those who do not discern the Lord's Presence in the Eucharist, or who respond with apathy. In her own account:

One day, kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament...I heard Him say: “Do what I’ve already so often asked you; you can’t show your love in a finer way than that!” He disclosed His divine Heart as He spoke: “There it is, that Heart so deeply in love with men...meets with scant appreciation from most of them; all I get back is ingratitude—witness their irreverence, their sacrileges, their coldness and contempt for Me in this Sacrament of Love. What hurts Me most is that hearts dedicated to My service behave in this way.

Then, after repeating His request for a feast of reparation in honor of His Heart, Jesus promised:

I promise you that I shall open My Heart to all who honor Me in this way, and who get others to do the same; they will feel in all its fullness the power of My love.

Our cooperation with the transforming power of the Eucharist is essential. It is like plugging in a lamp. Power is there to light it, but unless we plug it in and turn the switch, the light won’t go on. So too, the light of Christ will enlighten and shine through us only with our cooperation.



## CHAPTER THREE

# THE CHASTE HEART OF JESUS

In the 1980s pop radio stations played a song entitled “Hole Hearted.” Its catchy refrain went, “There’s a hole in my heart that can only be filled by you.” The song was meant, of course, to express romantic love, but it speaks far better about our relationship with God. Saint Augustine famously declared that each one of us is made for union with God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in God.

### **Our Heart’s God-Shaped Hole**

We each have a God-shaped hole in our hearts, an emptiness that only God can fill. Yet much of the time we don’t recognize our need for God. We try to fill the hole with all sorts of other things—possessions and position, power and prestige, pleasures and people. We think we want these things. We believe they will satisfy our deepest needs. They may, in fact, distract us from our built-in hunger for God, but they will not truly satisfy us.

Only God can satisfy us—eternally, yes—but also in our present moments. We have heard this before. We have perhaps even experienced that satisfaction from time to time. But how do we make this satisfaction a continuous aspect of our lives as consecrated persons? *Chastity*.

Pope John Paul II called the vow of chastity the “‘door’ of the whole consecrated life.”<sup>1</sup> Through chastity a consecrated person’s heart is configured to Jesus Christ, who is truly God-with-us. Only the chaste Heart of Jesus can fill our emptiness. Chastity, says Pope John Paul II, “expresses the yearning of a heart unsatisfied by any finite love.”<sup>2</sup>



## **The Meaning of True Love**

How few understand this! The world views chastity in negative terms, as a problem, even as an absurd sacrifice of something essential. The world sees love as a feeling. The heart symbol now everywhere declares one's love for all sorts of things: I ♥ New York! I ♥ cheese! I ♥ my schnauzer! In other words I love whatever gives me pleasure. It's all about me! I want to feel good! The love that satisfies does not center on myself. True love is something completely different.

Chastity is a sacrifice, but it is not a lack. Chastity opens us to the love which alone can satisfy. Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Deus Caritas Est* that if we want to see real love, if we want a definition for true love, we need to look at the pierced side of Jesus. The Roman centurion thrust his lance into Jesus' side and pushed it into His heart. Blood and water gushed out. In His pierced heart are joined the passionate love of *eros* and the selfless love of *agape*. The Son of God loves us with an intensity that expresses itself in His complete gift of self.<sup>3</sup> Jesus' love alone can fill the emptiness within because it is, as Christopher West has observed, free, total, faithful and fruitful.<sup>4</sup> This is the true love for which God has created us: union with Himself.

## **The Selfless Love of Christ**

The passionate, selfless love of the Son of God reached its climax on the Cross. Now it is made present at every celebration of Holy Mass. There Jesus offers Himself completely to the Father and to us, uniting Himself to us in Holy Communion. His Eucharistic Heart fills our hearts with love and we also receive the power to love with pure hearts.

In the Beatitudes Jesus declared: "Blessed are the pure of heart, they shall see God" (Mt 5:8). Purity of heart leads to true love. Those who are pure of heart, as Jesus and His mother Mary were, will be filled and will "see God."

Those who have pure hearts like Jesus' Heart will share His intimate relationship with the Father. They will be filled with hope and will say with Saint Paul: "The love of God has been

poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5).

Saint Paul prayed that the Ephesians would be “strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self.” To what end? “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:16-19). Those with pure hearts have no obstacle to being filled with God’s love. Their vision is pure, capable of seeing God clearly, without distraction or distortion.

### **Purity of Heart**

Full of God’s love, deeply satisfied by the love pouring out of the pure Heart of Christ, the pure of heart open their hearts to all people. They are overflowing with the love of the Father for all His children. In 2002 the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life said this: “Virginité opens the heart to the measure of Christ’s heart and makes it possible to love as He loved.”<sup>5</sup> The pure of heart do not see other people as objects for their pleasure. When one is filled with the love of God, one loves others with pure love. Purity of heart means not only being free of the stain of sin but also being purely or 100% devoted to God’s will. Purity of heart means seeing others as God sees them and willing the good that God desires for them. The pure of heart see God in others.

True love—love that is not self-seeking—is ultimately an act of the will. Consecrated persons who know the depths of the love of God revealed in the Heart of Jesus are free to love with the same sacrificial love with which Jesus loved. And the great mystery is that, by loving in this way, we are not emptied but filled even more. Love grows in loving.

Pope John Paul II reflected deeply on the following invocation in the Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus: “Heart of Jesus, enriching all who invoke You.” He said:

This is the generous Heart, because fullness abides in it: in Christ, true Man, abides the fullness of the divinity; and God is Love. He is generous because He loves, and to love means to expand, to give. To love means to be a gift. It means to be for others, to be for all, to be for each person. ...Love will never be depleted through this generosity but will grow. It grows continuously; such is the mysterious nature of love. And such is also the mystery of the Heart of Jesus, enriching all. It is open for each and every person. It is completely open of itself. Its generosity will never be depleted. The generosity of the Heart of Jesus gives testimony to the fact that love is not subject to the laws of death but to the laws of resurrection and life. It gives witness to the fact that love grows with love, such is its very nature.<sup>6</sup>

The love of the Heart of Jesus makes all this possible: a total love for God which overflows to a universal love of neighbor. Again, as Pope John Paul II put it:

Yes, in Christ it is possible to love God with all one's heart, putting Him above every other love, and thus to love every creature with the freedom of God! This testimony is more necessary than ever today, precisely because it is so little understood by our world. ...Thanks to this witness, human love is offered a stable point of reference: the pure love which consecrated persons draw from the contemplation of Trinitarian love, revealed to us in Christ. Precisely because they are immersed in this mystery, consecrated persons feel themselves capable of a radical and universal love.... Consecrated chastity thus appears as a joyful and liberating experience.<sup>7</sup>

Chastity is “joyful and liberating” because the heart of the consecrated person is no longer “hole hearted.” The consecrated heart in union with the Heart of Jesus becomes “whole hearted.” The chaste person does not try to fill up the

emptiness of human nature with things that can never satisfy. Instead, God fills the chaste person with His own love—with the fullness of Himself.



## CHAPTER FOUR

# THE POOR HEART OF JESUS

As a young Jesuit seminarian I worked on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in western South Dakota. Sometimes I would stop by to visit a lay co-worker who lived in a trailer on the mission property. It was a simple house in the middle of Shannon County, the poorest county in the United States. On a wall in his tiny bathroom he had put a big poster that showed the front of a fabulous mansion. Beneath the picture were these words: “I’ve been rich and I’ve been poor. Rich is better.”

I admit I was little surprised to see such a sentiment expressed in the home of a deeply committed Christian, as I knew my friend to be. At first I made excuses for him. Maybe the poster was there before he moved in. Maybe he didn’t see the contradiction. Or maybe he just thought the poster was funny. Looking back, I see I have since revised my opinion about why he displayed that poster in his bathroom. It took me a few years to get it.

Rich certainly does seem better than poor. The rich are well fed, well clothed, well housed, well educated, and well exercised. The rich are not necessarily selfish. They have the leisure to do good. The rich give to the poor hoping they will not be poor always. Poverty, on the other hand, is full of hunger and deprivation, hard work and ill health. It leads to a host of social and personal problems. No wonder most people see poverty as an evil and struggle to escape or overcome it.

### **“Blessed Are the Poor”**

Yet in the Beatitudes of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus says to us, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Mt 5:3). And in the Beati-

tudes of Luke's Gospel, Jesus speaks to us even more simply, "Blessed are the poor" (Lk 6:20). In both cases Jesus calls the poor "blessed" because the Kingdom of God belongs to them. Jesus is saying unequivocally that "poor is better."

Jesus lived what He preached. He came from Heaven, but He was born in a shelter for animals. Warned about the murderous intentions of Herod, the family had to flee to Egypt, political refugees. They stayed in Egypt several years as displaced persons, far away from their extended families and neighbors. When Jesus grew up, He embraced the hard life of the road. "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests," Our Lord said, "but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest His head" (Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58). In the words of a song by the late Rich Mullins, "The hope of the whole world rests on the shoulders of a homeless man." Quoting another song, a hymn of the first century, Saint Paul said that Jesus "emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil 2:7). Apparently Jesus saw value in poverty.

In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul tries to explain. "For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake He became poor although He was rich, so that by His poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9).

Jesus' poverty makes us rich? How does that happen? It's a mystery wrapped in paradox. Jesus' poverty makes us rich the same way that His death gives us life. Jesus' poverty makes us rich the same way as His gift of emptying Himself on the Cross and in the Eucharist fills us with the fullness of God. When Jesus died, His heart, overflowing with the love of the Father, poured out the riches of that love. In His death, Jesus gave the Church her sacramental life—the water and blood of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist.

### **Closely Configured to Christ**

We consecrated persons take a vow of poverty because we desire to be more closely configured to Christ. Our vow is our promise to be poor in both body and spirit, like Jesus, who possessed nothing and relied totally on the Father.

As we have seen previously, within each of us there is an emptiness that only God can fill.

Yet we are tempted to fill our emptiness with all sorts of things that do not belong there, including possessions and the comforts they bring. We are tempted to trust in material wealth, thinking it will save us from unhappiness and uncertainty. Although we know that “here we do not have a lasting city” (Heb 13:14), we are nonetheless tempted to establish, expand, and fortify our homes in this world. We are always in danger of forgetting our call to poverty.

The vow of poverty we take is a profound acknowledgment of the reality of the human condition. We recognize that we are born with nothing, and we take nothing with us when we die. No hearse ever had a luggage rack or pulled a U-Haul trailer.

The human and divine Heart of Jesus knew that we cannot take the material goods of this world to the next. Christ knew where true wealth lay: only in the love of the Father. He challenged His followers, saying: “Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be” (Lk 12:34). He did not mince words: “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God” (Lk 18:25). Every person who desires to be close to God must surrender all. Hands grasping for and holding onto things are not free to receive the greatest gift of all. The substitutes for God—the material idols we are tempted to cling to—close us to the true wealth that is God Himself. Pope John Paul II wrote: “Poverty proclaims that God is man’s only real treasure.”<sup>1</sup>

Our vow of poverty opens us not only to the love of God but also to the love of neighbor. Filled with the love of God, the Heart of Jesus has room for all, for the love of the Father embraces all His human children. And there is a special place in the Heart of Jesus for the poor. Pope John Paul II reminded us:

At the beginning of His ministry, in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus announces that the Spirit has consecrated Him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release



to captives, to give sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free... (cf. Lk 4:16-19).

The Church continues the mission of Jesus in caring for the poor. Those of us configured more closely to Christ through the evangelical counsels share Jesus' "preferential option" for the poor. Pope John Paul II continues:

The option for the poor is inherent in the very structure of love lived in Christ. All of Christ's disciples are therefore held to this option, but those who wish to follow the Lord more closely, imitating His attitudes, cannot but feel involved in a very special way. The sincerity of their response to Christ's love will lead them to live a life of poverty and to embrace the cause of the poor.<sup>2</sup>

### **Filled with the Love of God**

When it is truly lived, the vow of poverty configures the hearts of consecrated people to the poor Heart of Jesus. Emptied of all, consecrated persons can be filled with the love of God and with Jesus' love for the poor. Because we know Christ and the love revealed in His Heart, we can say with Saint Paul:

Whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him... (Phil 3:7-9).

So there I was, a naïve seminarian, standing in that tiny bathroom gazing at a poster of a fabulous mansion. The caption: "I've been rich and I've been poor. Rich is better." I didn't get it at the time. I didn't factor in my friend's humble manner of life and his service to the poorest people in the country. I am sure now that my friend understood the message of Jesus' poverty in a deep way. I believe he put up the poster as an ironic reminder that the true riches of God cannot be compared to the phony

riches of this world. He knew the riches of this world are, as Saint Paul said, so much rubbish. In the final analysis, the love of God is the only thing worthy of being called riches. When we embrace poverty to seek the love of God, we find our treasure in the Heart of Jesus. In our poverty, we are rich beyond all imagining. Truly, rich is better.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# THE OBEDIENT HEART OF JESUS

In his poem about Advent, W. H. Auden said: *“As long as the self can say ‘I, it is impossible not to rebel.’”*<sup>1</sup> And the history of our race proves him correct. From our first parents to today’s infant crying out in protest, humanity has been in rebellion—except for Jesus and His Blessed Mother. We who are striving to be fully conformed to Christ need the Heart of Jesus to become gentle and humble of heart. Only through the Heart of Christ may we learn obedience worthy of our consecration to Him.

### **The Witness of Obedient Hearts**

Perhaps now more than ever, our times require the witness of obedient hearts. In the late 1980s, when I interviewed candidates for religious life, they generally told me that they believed chastity would be the most difficult vow to honor. After some years living the consecrated life, however, my brothers and sisters admit that obedience is their most difficult vow. Although we live in a highly eroticized culture, the temptation to individualism is stronger yet. Popular songs of forty years ago told us, “It’s your thing; do what you wanna do,” or bragged “I did it my way,” revealing a cultural shift that has only intensified. Now everyone is liberated, following different drummers, seeking fulfillment of self. How preferable that seems to a vow to sacrifice our own wills and relinquish our freedom to choose. Giving up self-determination is harder than abstaining from sexual expression. Sex is a powerful drive, but our independent will is far greater. Self-will lies at the deepest core of the human person.

Jesus was poor and chaste, but the word which the New Testament uses most often to describe Him is *obedient*. The Letter to the Hebrews says, “Son though He was, He learned obedience from what He suffered” (5:8). And, “when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You prepared for Me; holocausts and sin offerings You took no delight in.’ Then I said, ‘As is written of Me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do Your will, O God’” (10:5-7).

In John’s Gospel, Jesus declares: “My food is to do the will of the one who sent Me and to finish His work” (4:34). And, “I cannot do anything on My own; I judge as I hear, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the one who sent Me” (5:30). And again, “I came down from Heaven not to do My own will but the will of the One who sent Me” (6:38).

### **Humility is Key**

As the vow of poverty leads us to shed all our possessions so that Christ may be our only possession, and as the vow of chastity leads us to direct all our passion toward a spousal relationship with Christ, so the vow of obedience leads us to surrender our will so that we can know, love and serve God’s will above all. The key to such surrender is humility.

The vow of obedience is achieved only through humility. In his Letter to the Philippians Saint Paul says that Jesus “emptied Himself...*humbled* Himself, becoming *obedient* to death, even death on a cross” (2:7-8). Paul says that every Christian should put on Jesus’ attitude of humility and obedience.

Humility is a heart that is emptied of self-will in order to be filled with God’s will. This emptying is not easy. Jesus Himself struggled to do the will of the Father. On the night before He died, He literally sweat blood as He prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from Me; still, not My will but Yours be done” (Lk 22:42).

Jesus could surrender His will because He knew the love of the Father in the depths of His Heart. Grounded in the intimate

love of the Father, He trusted completely in the Father's plan. He shared the love of the Father for the human race. In the end the Father's love for the Son and the Father's love for humanity led Jesus to yield His own will to the will of the Father. This is love in the highest possible sense, the union of wills.

### **Obedience as the Context of Love**

And so it is for us as well. Obedience makes sense only in the context of love. When we know God's love for us, we respond to it by sharing God's love with all His children. Our obedience to God's love involves our will uniting with God's will. This is what Cardinal Rodé, the former Prefect for the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life, called "radical obedience." He wrote: "Only the child who senses himself loved by the Father and loves Him with his whole self can arrive at this type of radical obedience."<sup>2</sup>

For consecrated persons, then, the only way to live the vow of obedience is through union with the obedient Heart of Jesus. The Father reveals His passionate love for us through this Heart. And we are able to respond to the love of the Father only insofar as we have a heart like Jesus' Heart, united to the will of the loving Father.

Such loving obedience is freedom. Our obedience is not the worldly freedom to "do your thing" or have it "my way." Worldly freedom enslaves. Our radical obedience gives us the true freedom to be the persons God created us to be. Our vow of obedience lets us become truly free as Jesus was. Pope John Paul II wrote that our obedience "re-proposes the obedience of Christ to the Father and ... testifies that *there is no contradiction between obedience and freedom*. Indeed," Pope John Paul continues, "the Son's attitude discloses the mystery of human freedom as the path of obedience to the Father's will..."<sup>3</sup>

This is a great mystery. It is one of the great secrets Jesus taught us: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (Jn 12:24). He spoke it in His words, and He

lived it in His life. Unless we too lay aside our own will, abandon our independence, and die to our very self, we will not truly live. The obedience to God requires an abandonment of the “I” that finds it impossible *not* to rebel.

We seek to obey God by putting off the self and putting on humility. Humility does not mean we think badly of ourselves. Thinking badly of ourselves still leaves us at the center of our attention. Proper humility responds to God’s love for us by redirecting all our attention away from ourselves and toward God and neighbor. True humility does not think less of ourselves but allows us to think of ourselves less.

### **Contributing to the Good of the Body**

The Body of Christ is made up of many parts, as Saint Paul wrote. Each individual person is a cell within the Body. We are nourished by the Blood flowing from the Heart of Jesus, so each of us can contribute to the good of the whole Body. We can contribute, that is, unless we rebel. If we rebel, we become like a cancer cell that asserts itself against the good of the whole body.

Individualism is a spreading cancer that threatens the health of the entire Body of Christ. Individualism is the repetition of the original rebellion of our first parents and the *Non Serviam*—“I will not serve!”—of Satan himself. The obedience of consecrated persons, configured more closely to Christ through the evangelical counsels, makes reparation for this sin. Obedience repairs the damage of sinful disobedience, as Saint Paul wrote to the Romans: “For just as through the disobedience of one person the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of one the many will be made righteous” (5:19).

Cardinal Rodé said such obedience is “radical.” It is a gift and a grace. It is impossible for the human person to live this radical obedience alone and unaided. But, as Jesus said, “all things are possible for God” (Mk 10:27). We can have the humble and obedient attitude that Saint Paul says is necessary for Christians. We can live in humble obedience because we

have been given the Heart of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. His Heart transforms ours, making them humble and obedient so that we can say, with Saint Paul, “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).





## CHAPTER SIX

# THE HEARTS OF JESUS AND MARY: TWO HEARTS BEAT AS ONE

It makes sublime sense that the Church celebrates the feasts of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary right next to each other on the liturgical calendar, for their two hearts beat as one. Their hearts are one in their total consecration to the Father “who wills everyone to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4). Through our devotion to Mary’s Immaculate Heart, we fulfill our vocation as consecrated persons to be configured to Christ. By our vows and through the Eucharist, our hearts can beat as one with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

### **Configuring Ourselves to Christ through Mary**

Pope John Paul II said, “The heart of Mary is like the Heart of her Son in all things.”<sup>1</sup> If we want to be configured to Christ and His Heart, we find no better model than Mary and her Immaculate Heart. No human person was so closely configured to Christ as His mother Mary, so we cannot talk about the Sacred Heart and the consecrated life without also talking about Mary and her Immaculate Heart. Her Heart is like the Heart of Jesus in its chastity, poverty and obedience.

Mary’s heart is chaste in its desire to see God’s will be done. Mary is whole-heartedly devoted to God and shares His love for His creation. There is no self-centered love in her heart, nothing self-indulgent, nothing distracting her from the pure love of God and neighbor. Her absolute abandonment to the will of the Father occasioned the conception of the Son of God in her womb. Her heart fed His as the love of God fed hers. The

Beatitude that Jesus gave us—“Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8)—was first realized in Mary. Completely pure of heart, she was the first to see God when she looked upon the face of her newborn Son.

Mary’s heart is poor. She was one of the *anawim*, the poor of Israel who depended not on possessions and wealth but upon God alone. Her song in response to Elizabeth’s praise speaks of her total humility, with nothing as her own. Her Magnificat rejoiced that God “has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness,” and that the “Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name” (Lk 1:48-49).

Mary’s heart is obedient. Like the Heart of her Son, hers is totally obedient to the will of the Father. We see it first in her celebrated *fiat*, her great “yes” to God at the Annunciation. “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to Your word” (Lk 1:38). Her words of surrender are echoed in the words of Jesus at the end of His bloody struggle in a garden the night before He died. Jesus said, “Not My will but Yours be done” (Lk 22:42). We see Mary’s obedience again when the sword of sorrow pierced her heart (cf. Lk 1:35) at the same moment when His own Heart was pierced. In perfect obedience Mary offered her Son as He offered Himself on the Cross for the salvation of the world.

### **Mary Gave Flesh to God’s Son**

Theologians and spiritual authors have said that Mary first received in her heart what she then conceived in her womb—the Word of God. In fact, in the First Preface for the Votive Mass of Mary, Image and Mother of the Church, we pray: “She received Your Word in the purity of her heart and, conceiving in her virgin womb, gave birth to our Savior and so nurtured the Church at its beginning.” In this way, Mary gave flesh to the Son of God who gave His flesh for the life of the world and who continues to unite His flesh to ours in the Holy Eucharist. Because her Heart received the Word and she conceived the Word in her womb, Mary

is the Mother of Christ and the Mother of the Body of Christ, the Church.

The Hearts of Jesus and Mary speak the same language. Pope John Paul II observed, “Between the heart of the Mother and the Heart of the Child (her Son) there was from the very beginning a bond, a splendid union of hearts. The heart of Mary is the first to speak to the Heart of Jesus.”<sup>2</sup> It was “under the heart of the Virgin of Nazareth, the Heart of the Word, the Son of God, began to beat.”<sup>3</sup> Together, the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary molded the Heart of Jesus, before and after His birth.

The Spirit molded the Heart of Jesus in the womb of Mary, who collaborated actively with Him as mother and educator. As mother, she adhered knowingly and freely to the salvific plan of God the Father.... As educator, she had molded the Heart of her son; with Saint Joseph she introduced Him to the traditions of the Chosen People, inspired in Him a love for the Law of the Lord, communicated to Him the spirituality of the ‘poor of the Lord.’ She had helped Him to develop His intellect and exercised a sure influence in the formation of His character. ...Therefore we can truly say: in the Heart of Christ there shines forth the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit; in it there is also reflected the heart of His Mother.<sup>4</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI spoke in the same fashion at a Marian vigil: “We may therefore be certain that the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, in the whole of His hidden life in Nazareth, always found in His Mother’s Immaculate Heart a ‘hearth’ ever alight with prayer and with constant attention to the voice of the Spirit.”<sup>5</sup> Truly Mary “knew His Heart” like no other human being.<sup>6</sup> We go to her to know His Heart as well.

### **The Woman of the Eucharist**

But there is more. Praying with Mary and following her example, we not only come to know the Heart of Jesus, but we can in a real and sacramental way give flesh to Jesus today. We are most closely configured to Christ through the Eucharist. In his

encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II called Mary “Woman of the Eucharist” and explained:

The Eucharist, while commemorating the Passion and Resurrection, is also in continuity with the Incarnation. At the Annunciation Mary conceived the Son of God in the physical reality of His Body and Blood, thus anticipating within herself what to some degree happens sacramentally in every believer who receives, under the signs of bread and wine, the Lord’s Body and Blood. As a result, there is a profound analogy between the *Fiat* which Mary said in reply to the angel, and the *Amen* which every believer says when receiving the Body of the Lord.<sup>7</sup>

By surrendering ourselves in Holy Communion to the Word of God, Jesus unites His flesh with ours and “the two become one.” In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: “The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the Body of Christ, His own Flesh and Blood.”<sup>8</sup>

The Eucharist is the source and summit of all holiness because Jesus alone, fully present in the Eucharist—Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, including His Sacred Heart—unites the one who receives Him to himself and transforms that person. This is all the work of grace. It is God’s gift for which we, with a heart like Mary’s, can only be receptive and grateful. We need a heart like Mary’s so that God’s grace may flow in us and through us with no obstacle of sin to block its activity. We need immaculate hearts.

United to the Heart of Jesus in the Eucharist, this Heart which took flesh through the Immaculate Heart and in the womb of the Virgin Mary, we make a total consecration of ourselves to God. Our vows are the further development of our baptismal consecration. In offering ourselves totally to the Father, we follow the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Pope John Paul II wrote:

Mary in fact is the *sublime example of perfect consecration*, since she belongs completely to God and is totally devoted to Him.

Chosen by the Lord, who wished to accomplish in her the mystery of the Incarnation, she reminds consecrated persons of *the primacy of God's initiative*. At the same time, having given her assent to the Divine Word, made flesh in her, Mary is the *model of the acceptance of grace* by human creatures.<sup>9</sup>

The musical group U-2 has a song entitled “Two Hearts Beat as One.” While this is a nice description of romantic love, it most accurately describes the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Their two Hearts beat as one in their total consecration to the Father. So we pray, in the words of John Paul II:

We ask you, Mother of Christ, to be our guide to the Heart of your Son. We pray to you, lead us close to Him and teach us to live in intimacy with this Heart, which is the fountain of life and holiness.<sup>10</sup>



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# LIVING IN UNION WITH THE HEART OF JESUS

In these reflections we have looked at the role that devotion to the Sacred Heart plays in the lives of consecrated men and women who are called through the evangelical counsels to be more closely configured to Christ. This configuration can be greatly fostered by our devotion to the Heart of Jesus, the “core” of the Son of God who became one with humanity so that we might become one with Him.

By reflecting on the poor, chaste and obedient Heart of Jesus, we learn more about how we are to live our vows. We are also led to consider the one who gave flesh to the Heart of the Son of God: Mary, whose Immaculate Heart perfectly reflects the evangelical counsels. And in the Eucharist we receive the Heart of Jesus who, in uniting Himself to us in a Holy Communion, transforms our cold, sin-hardened hearts into natural, loving hearts.

### **Practical Considerations**

But, practically speaking, what form should our devotion take? How may we nurture our devotion to the Heart of Jesus so that we grow in the evangelical counsels? There are a multitude of individual and community practices, and I would suggest that, rather than adding more devotions to one’s prayer life, we should approach our traditional practices with a heart-centered focus. Let’s see what this means for six devotional practices.

**1. *Lectio Divina or Praying with Scripture.*** The Word of God is ever “living and effective” (Heb 4:12). In Scripture, God



speaks to our hearts and allows us to enter more deeply into His Heart. Through the practice of Ignatian contemplation we can imagine a Gospel scene, seeing and hearing the characters and using the senses to make the scene come alive for us. But this is still external. We can go even deeper by becoming one of the figures, imagining what was going through the mind and heart of that person, his or her thoughts and feelings. Then after considering the interior movements of the various characters, we turn to Jesus Himself. What was going on inside of Him? What did He see? What was He thinking and feeling? In what ways was He moved by what He saw? Entering more deeply into Jesus' interior in this way can help us take on His perspectives, attitudes, thoughts and feelings.

**2. *Eucharistic Devotion.*** Pope John Paul II wrote:

Remaining in silence before the Blessed Sacrament, it is Christ totally and really present whom we discover, whom we adore and with whom we are in contact.... It is invaluable to converse with Christ and, leaning against Jesus' breast like His beloved disciple, we can feel the infinite love of His Heart. We learn to know more deeply the One who gave Himself totally, in the different mysteries of His divine and human life, so that we may become disciples and in turn enter into this great act of giving, for the glory of God and the salvation of the world. "Following Christ is not an outward imitation, since it touches man at the very depths of his being" (*Veritatis Splendor*, no. 21).<sup>1</sup>

Whether our prayer before the Sacred Heart of Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament is a colloquy—a heart to Heart talk with Our Lord in which we share our burdens, concerns, desires, distractions, and love and listen for His response—or simply an abiding in His presence—a time in which we soak up the light and love coming from the Son who is more powerful than the sun which He created—Eucharistic devotion is a powerful way of growing in a Heart-centered spirituality. This devotion prepares us to offer ourselves with Jesus as He offers Himself to the

Father in every Sacrifice of the Mass. And it prepares us for the union of hearts that occurs when we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Receiving His Heart transforms our sinful hearts and allows the grace of every Holy Communion to grow.

**3. *The Rosary.*** Pope John Paul II wrote:

The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christocentric prayer. In the sobriety of its elements, it has all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety, of which it can be said to be a compendium. With the Rosary, the Christian people sits at the school of Mary and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of His love.... The Rosary, precisely because it starts with Mary's own experience, is an exquisitely contemplative prayer.<sup>2</sup>

Through the mysteries of the Rosary we enter into the Immaculate Heart of Mary and try to see Jesus through her eyes. We take on the attitudes and values of the heart which, more than any other human heart, was perfectly configured to Christ's Heart.

**4. *Sacred Heart Consecration.*** Over the centuries, individuals, families, and religious congregations have consecrated themselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. They have enthroned Him as King of their hearts, honoring in a prominent place an image of His Sacred Heart. Such a consecration and its periodic renewal can be an opportunity to renew one's consecrations at Baptism and religious vows. Our consecration is always a response to the One who has taken the initiative in our lives. Linking this consecration to Baptism and vows can be a way of ensuring that the evangelical counsels we strive to live do not become legal prescriptions but acts of love.

**5. *Morning or Daily Offering.*** Our consecration to the Sacred Heart can be renewed every morning with the offering of our day. In offering our prayers, works, joys and sufferings—our thoughts, words, and deeds, every breath and every heart

beat—we look ahead to the day that lies before us and anticipate the opportunities we will have to love with the Heart of Jesus.

**6. *Examen, Examination of Conscience, or Evening Review.*** At the end of each day we look back at how we have lived out our consecration to the Sacred Heart. How did Jesus share with us the riches of His heart today? How have we loved with the Heart of Jesus? How did we fail to love?

Devotion to the Sacred Heart is not one spiritual practice among others, just one more devotional option. Pope Benedict XVI has called devotion to the Heart of Christ something that is “irreplaceable” and “indispensable.”<sup>3</sup> By situating Sacred Heart devotion within our usual spiritual practices, we can deepen these practices to help us grow in love with the Heart which is at the center of our faith and our consecration. The evangelical counsels are truly the heart of the matter—His and ours.

## CHAPTER NOTES

### CHAPTER ONE

1. Bruce Marchiano, *In the Footsteps of Jesus* (Eugene, Oregon, Harvest House Publishers, 1997) p. 115
2. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 115-116.
4. Pope Benedict XVI's Letter on the 50th Anniversary of *Haurietis Aquas*, May 15, 2006.
5. *Vita Consecrata*, no. 16.
6. *Ibid.*, no. 18.

### CHAPTER TWO

1. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.
2. *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, no. 18.
3. Pope Benedict XVI's Homily at Closing Mass, World Youth Day, Marienfeld, Cologne, Aug. 21, 2005.

### CHAPTER THREE

1. *Vita Consecrata*, no. 32.
2. *Ibid.*, no. 36.
3. Cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, nos. 9-12.
4. *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, pp. 91, 141.
5. *Starting Afresh from Christ*, no. 22.
6. Angelus Message, Aug. 3, 1986.
7. *Vita Consecrata*, no. 88.

### CHAPTER FOUR

1. *Vita Consecrata*, no. 21.
2. *Ibid.*, no. 82.

### CHAPTER FIVE

1. W. H. Auden, *Advent IV*, Recitative.
2. *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, 2008.
3. *Vita Consecrata*, no. 91.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

1. Pope John Paul II's Angelus Address, Sept. 3, 1989.
2. Angelus Address, June 30, 1985.
3. Angelus Address, July 14, 1985.
4. Angelus Address, July 2, 1989.
5. Pope Benedict XVI's Address in Vatican Gardens, May 30, 2009.
6. Angelus Address, Aug. 3, 1986.
7. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 55.
8. Pope Benedict XVI's Homily at Closing Mass, World Youth Day, Marienfeld, Cologne, Aug. 21, 2005
9. *Vita Consecrata*, no. 28.
10. Angelus Address, Sept. 10, 1986.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

1. Pope John Paul II's Letter on the 750th anniversary of the Feast of *Corpus Christi*, May, 28, 1996.
2. Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, nos. 1, 12.
3. Letter on the 50th Anniversary of *Haurietis Aquas*, May 15, 2006.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

### CHAPTER ONE

1. How are religious called to enter into Jesus' point of view by living the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience?
2. In what ways ought religious and other consecrated persons express sincere compassion to others?
3. What are some ways that we can concretely manifest our configuration to Christ in our daily lives?
4. How can devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus help to foster a heart knowledge of God rather than a mere head knowledge?

### CHAPTER TWO

1. How is Ezekiel's prophecy of a "new heart" and a "new spirit" made manifest in the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus?
2. How does the consecrated life serve as a visible witness and reminder of Christ's victory of love over hatred, the victory of love over death?
3. In what ways ought the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus be the perfect image and model for those living the evangelical counsels?
4. How can religious and other consecrated persons plug themselves into the transforming power of the Eucharist on a daily basis?

### CHAPTER THREE

1. Why is prayer essential to help fill the "God-shaped hole" in the hearts of consecrated religious?
2. How does the vow of chastity open wide the doors of our hearts so that we can radiate the love of Christ to others?

3. In what ways do consecrated religious embrace the Cross of Christ by means of their purity of heart and by striving to live sacrificial love as perfectly modeled by Christ?
4. How can religious and other consecrated persons effectively witness to the world the fact that chastity is truly “joyful and liberating”?

#### **CHAPTER FOUR**

1. How is Jesus’ example of embracing poverty a model for religious and other consecrated persons to imitate?
2. How does the vow of poverty allow God to fill the void in our lives that only He can fill?
3. In what ways does poverty more perfectly open us to the love of God and the love of neighbor?
4. Why do you think that the “preferential option for the poor” is inherent in the very structure of love lived in Christ Jesus?
5. How can the vow of poverty configure the hearts of consecrated persons to the poor Heart of Jesus?

#### **CHAPTER FIVE**

1. Why is humility the key virtue needed to surrender to God in poverty, chastity and obedience?
2. Why did Jesus surrender His will in radical obedience to His Heavenly Father?
3. Why does the vow of obedience only make sense in the context of love?
4. What is the best way for consecrated persons to live the vow of obedience?
5. How can the vow of obedience assist us to make reparation for the sin of individualism?

#### **CHAPTER SIX**

1. How is Mary’s Immaculate Heart like Jesus’ Sacred Heart in its chastity, poverty and obedience?
2. In what way did Our Lady first receive the Word-made-Flesh in her heart before she received Him later in her Immaculate womb?

3. How did Mary collaborate with the Holy Spirit in molding the Heart of Jesus?
4. How can we come to know the Heart of Jesus in a real and sacramental way?
5. How does the profession of the evangelical counsels with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary assist us in living our baptismal consecration?

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

1. How can our devotion to the Heart of Jesus help us get to the core of the person and mission of the Son of God?
2. In what way does meditation upon Scripture aid us in our quest to take on the perspectives, attitudes, thoughts and feelings of Jesus?
3. Why is the Eucharist invaluable in our “heart-to-Heart” conversation with Christ?
4. How does the “school of Mary” assist us in developing the proper sentiments needed to configure our own hearts to Christ’s Heart ?
5. How does consecration to the Sacred Heart relate to living one’s baptismal and religious consecrations?
6. Why are the spiritual practices of the morning offering and the evening examen critical to growing in authentic love of Jesus?





## APPENDIX I

### THE APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER

“I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.”

—Rom 12:1

**T**he Apostleship of Prayer is a worldwide association of the faithful. It began in 1844 when Rev. Francis X. Gautrelet, S.J., told a group of Jesuit seminarians who were eager to work on the missions: “Don’t wait to be apostles! Be apostles right now! Be apostles of prayer! Offer everything you are doing each day in union with the Heart of our Lord for what He wishes—the spread of the Kingdom for the salvation of souls.”

The seminarians took up his challenge. The idea that every moment of the day can be offered up as an act of love for God and neighbor spread beyond the seminary to the whole world. Since 1844, the daily offering has given meaning to the daily lives of hundreds of millions of Catholics.

Truly the Apostleship of Prayer is, as Pope John Paul II once said, “a precious treasure from the Pope’s heart and the Heart of Christ.” Members of the Apostleship offer themselves in response to the love of Jesus revealed through His Heart. The love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus fills, nourishes, and inspires them. Apostles of Prayer have deep affection for the Vicar of Christ, the pope, and commit themselves to praying and working for his monthly intentions. Since the late 1800s, popes have made specific prayer requests. For over eighty years now, the pope has asked the Apostleship of Prayer to publish for all the faithful

two prayer intentions each month. For this reason some call the Apostleship of Prayer “The Holy Father’s Prayer Group.”

The daily offering of the Apostleship of Prayer is not one spiritual practice among many other possible devotions but is at the heart of the Christian life. As Jesus offered Himself on Calvary and renews that offering in every Mass, so every believer is called to make an offering of his or her life to the Father with Jesus. The perfect love of Jesus inspires Christians to return love for love, to offer themselves as Jesus offered Himself for them. This is what it means to “live the Eucharist” even when one cannot participate in the daily Eucharistic celebration. At Baptism the faithful were anointed with sacred chrism and made to share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The daily offering is how everyone can exercise this priesthood of the faithful. The offering helps Christians integrate prayer and action—the prayer of uniting oneself to the will of God at the beginning of the day and the actions that flow from that union. Like the love of God, one’s offering is redemptive, made in reparation for sins. The offering redeems even the mundane hours and mundane tasks of everyday life and transfigures them into effective prayer. The daily offering enables a believer to become one with Jesus and His work. Nothing is more basic to living the Christian life than one’s daily offering.

How does one make an offering of oneself to God? It can be done in many ways: by attentive participation in the Eucharist; by saying one of the dozens of offering prayers the saints have used through the ages; by speaking spontaneous words of offering aloud or silently, alone or with others; or by silent adoration and the wordless movement of the heart. The daily offering is deeply personal, expressing the conscious choice each day to give oneself wholly for the good of others as Jesus did.

For more information or to enroll contact:

Apostleship of Prayer  
1501 S. Layton Blvd.  
Milwaukee, WI 53215  
414-486-1152  
[ApostleshipofPrayer.org](http://ApostleshipofPrayer.org)

## APPENDIX II

### THE INSTITUTE ON RELIGIOUS LIFE

“The whole Christian community—pastors, laity and consecrated persons—is responsible for the consecrated life, for welcoming and supporting vocations.”

—*Vita Consecrata*, no. 105

#### **What is the INSTITUTE ON RELIGIOUS LIFE?**

The INSTITUTE ON RELIGIOUS LIFE (IRL) is a national organization of bishops, priests, religious and lay persons, founded to promote and to support the consecrated life, particularly vowed religious life, as a gift to the entire Church and an evangelical witness to the world.

#### **What are its purposes?**

In 1974, Rev. John A. Hardon, S.J., Servant of God, with the approval of the Sacred Congregation for Religious, enlisted the support of bishops, religious superiors and lay men and women to found the IRL:

(a) To foster a deeper communion of institutes of consecrated life within the Roman Catholic Church;

(b) To promote the gift of consecrated life and the understanding and spiritual support thereof, among Catholic individuals and organizations; to assist individual Catholic religious and religious institutes through the efforts of the laity, religious, clergy and hierarchy; and to aid in the implementation of the principles of consecrated life as delineated by the Holy See and as set forth by the Second Vatican Council’s *Lumen Gentium*

(Chapter 6) and *Perfectae Caritatis*, and their expression in *Vita Consecrata*; and

(c) To address issues affecting consecrated life, in particular the challenges facing emerging communities of consecrated life and the fostering of religious vocations in the Church.

### **How does the IRL accomplish this?**

It has a six-point program to realize its mission and purpose:

- 1) Prayer and sacrifices of its members;
- 2) Study and research;
- 3) Education and information;
- 4) Advice and consultation;
- 5) Publicity and communications; and
- 6) Regional and national meetings and classes.

### **How can I become an IRL member?**

For more information please contact:

INSTITUTE ON RELIGIOUS LIFE  
P.O. Box 7500  
Libertyville, IL 60048-7500  
847-573-8975  
[ReligiousLife.com](http://ReligiousLife.com)

"In his book, *A Matter of the Heart: Meditations on the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Consecrated Life*, Rev. James Kubicki, S.J., offers spiritual reflections that encourage religious men and women, as well as other consecrated persons, to configure themselves after the Heart of Christ. Having professed the evangelical counsels, such consecrated souls ought to desire to develop an intimate 'Heart-to-heart' relationship with Our Lord so that they can be more perfectly formed in His image and likeness."

—Raymond L. Cardinal Burke



**L**oving with the Heart of Jesus! Who can deny that our ultimate calling as Christians is to love with the Heart of Jesus? And if devotion to the Sacred Heart is urged upon all the faithful, how much more essential is it for a consecrated person who is called to follow Christ wholeheartedly "by conforming one's whole existence to Christ."

Ultimately such conformity is a matter of the heart. Beginning with "heart knowledge" of God's deep personal love, each of us is called to come to know Him intimately. This is the knowledge that transforms hearts and configures consecrated persons more closely to Jesus, one day at a time.

In this book, Rev. James Kubicki, S.J., National Director of the Apostleship of Prayer, provides rich reflections on why devotion to the Sacred Heart is not one devotion among many, nor the particular charism of a few, but an essential element of the Christian life. In it he shows how such devotion is essential to any authentic spirituality, especially for those seeking to be closely configured to Christ through the profession of the evangelical counsels. He also offers practical considerations and practices on how to live this configuration to the Sacred Heart so that one can truly grow in the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.



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