

+

At this point in the Church's year, we find ourselves within two Octaves of major feast days, the Octave of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Octave of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist. The Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the celebration of Jesus' Divine and perfect human love for all mankind, which comes to us from Catholic tradition. The Feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist also comes from Catholic tradition and is preserved for us in the Book of Common Prayer. This past Friday, these two feasts fell on the same day, which is fitting because in one Feast we celebrate the Saint whose life mission was to prepare human hearts for the coming of Jesus, and in the other we celebrate the perfect love of Jesus for all.

It is also fitting that the past few weeks we have celebrated major feast days with lessons focused exclusively on love, how God has shown His great love for us, and how we are to love God and our neighbors. With all of this in mind however, I recognize that for some "the Sacred Heart of Jesus" may conjure up antique, romantic, perhaps even folksy, Catholic piety and devotion. I confess I have found it tempting to think of the Sacred Heart as somewhat passive-aggressive, the southern evangelical version I grew up with went something like "if you misbehave and are not a good boy, you will break Jesus' Heart and make Him cry." Thankfully, the Sacred Heart of Jesus is not passive-aggressive.

Still, some may wonder why Anglicans celebrate this feast day at all. The simplest answer is that devotion to the Sacred Heart began almost after Christ's Crucifixion with devotion to the spear wound in the Lord's side. Anytime that we hear of the water and the blood that flowed from the side of the Christ, every time we mix the water and wine in the chalice at Mass, we are remembering the Sacred Heart of Jesus which burst for the love of all mankind. This devotion was extremely popular in medieval England and even survived the English Reformation and is present in the writing of the great theologians, the Caroline Divines, such as Bp. Launcelot Andrews, one of the translators of the King James Bible. However, devotion to The Sacred Heart of Jesus was further popularized by St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in the late 1600's.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus, regardless of what we think of the devotion, has its heart in the Gospel. The Sacred Heart reminds us again that God was made flesh,

that through the Incarnation, God is made man, and God has a human heart. Jesus has a human heart which burst with love on the cross for all mankind. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is rooted in sacrifice. One popular phrase associated with the Sacred Heart is *Behold this heart which has so loved men*. But the most important thing to remember about the Sacred Heart of Jesus, is that our hearts are called to be transformed by and reflect the Heart of Jesus Christ. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is an image of what our hearts are supposed to look like.

The prayers for the Sacred Heart ask *O Sacred Heart of Jesus, make our hearts more like thine!* We pray that God will instill in us Charity for all people, just as our Lord loved and sacrificed His life for all people. St. John's Epistle for today has plenty more to say on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren*. St. John reminds us also that because of God's great love for us, *let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth*. St. John, the beloved Disciple, makes it clear, if we claim to love God, then we must love each other, for salvation comes from *loving God with all of our hearts, with all of our souls, and with all of our minds, and loving our neighbors as ourselves*.

We are commanded to conform our hearts to the heart of Jesus Christ. *O Sacred Heart of Jesus, make our hearts more like thine!* This morning we are presented with parable showing us what happens when we fill our hearts with worldly possessions, business, and earthly pleasure instead of God. We see in this parable that the host of the great feast is God, who has already invited guests to His feast, they had already made their reservations, and yet when the time for the feast comes, they gave excuses. And what poor excuses they were, their excuses show that regardless of the day or the time of the feast they had no intention of attending. But all men make their own choices, and these three guests chose worldly possessions, business, and earthly pleasure over a seat at the feast of everlasting life. They refuse to make a sacrifice even for an evening, and the host forbids them from attending the great feast.

The Love of God cannot go unanswered, and the Host invites as many as can be compelled to come into the feast. *Behold this heart which has so loved men*. The lame, the halt, the maimed, the blind, those who were seen as less than and unclean are invited into the great feast and seated with honor. The Host thinks

nothing of sacrificing what others may think of Him by bringing in these from the highways and byways, just as our Lord thought nothing of eating with sinners and publicans either. This is no great thing when we put the feast into the perspective of our Lord's death and sacrifice for sinners. And like the feast in this morning's parable, the Lord's act of sacrificial love on the cross goes unheeded. Excuses for turning to the cross abound. There is nothing lacking in the cross and every sin is covered. There is nothing lacking in the feast either, a symbol for the Kingdom of Heaven. What is missing is the character and nature of our priorities. One can only imagine how it must grieve our Lord that the very ones He died for would choose earthly possessions, business, and pleasure over the Love of God.

Isaiah the prophet tells us what God in His infinite love desires for all mankind. *In this mountain, [in the Kingdom of Heaven] shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast...and He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces.* And all those that the Lord has drawn unto Himself in the Kingdom of Heaven will proclaim that this is the Lord our Salvation. May the Lord make our hearts more like His most Sacred Heart. May we learn to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts with all of our minds and with all of our souls, and our neighbors as ourselves. May we not offer the Lord excuses but accept His invitation to the feast of Heaven, and may we ever sing:

*O Sacred fount of love Sublime! O living Spring of waters free!  
O fire to cleanse away all crime! O Heart aflame with charity!  
Lord, keep us ever in thy Heart, Thy tender love to feel and know.  
The joys of heaven to us impart, When we shall leave these walks below.  
Amen.*