

Hereby perceive we the Love of God...

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This past Friday the Church celebrated the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This feast day traditionally falls on the Friday after the First Sunday after Trinity. It makes sense, as we have celebrated in the past few weeks the feast of Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi, and the past couple of Epistles by St. John have focused exclusively on love, how we are to love God and our neighbors. With all of this in mind however, we recognize that for some “the Sacred Heart of Jesus” conjures up antique, romantic, perhaps even folksy, Roman Catholic, piety and devotion. Some may wonder though what this has to do with Anglicans? Devotion to the Sacred Heart began almost after Christ’s Crucifixion with devotion to the wound in the Lord’s side. This devotion was extremely popular in medieval England and even survived the English Reformation and is present in the Caroline Divines, such as Bp. Launcelot Andrews, one of the translators of the King James Bible. This of course predates the modern version of the Sacred Heart, made popular by St. Margaret Mary Alacoque which we see today.

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. A human heart which burst 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*. The prayers for the Sacred Heart ask that God would instill in us Charity for all people, just as our Lord loved and gave His life for all people. St. John’s Epistle for today has plenty 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*. We heard last week, that *if we say that we love God and hate each other then we are liars*. 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..., obeying His commandments, 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!* We heard last week in the Parable of the rich man and Lazarus what happens when we do not conform our hearts to the heart of Jesus Christ and do not love our neighbor as ourselves. The rich man had the opportunity daily to minister to Lazarus and yet he chose to ignore him, and Jesus says that for his hardness of heart the rich man was cast into hell. This morning we are presented with another parable, this time showing us what happens when we put worldly possessions, business, and earthly pleasure before God. Reading between the lines, 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 give excuses. And what poor excuses they are, but they make their choice. Three guests choose worldly possessions, business, and earthly pleasure before 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. This parable shows us what happens to those who refuse to love God with all of their hearts, with all of their souls, and with all of their minds.

Thankfully, 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, but our Lord thought nothing of eating with sinners and publicans either. This is no great thing when we put the feast into perspective of our Lord's death and sacrifice for sinners. 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, every sin is covered, there is nothing lacking in the feast either, a symbol for the Kingdom of Heaven, there is only the lack in 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 voering 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.*