

Feast of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary — June 19, 2020

Happy feast day to all who are with us in our hearts, near and far—thanks to technology!

While this day is a feast for our Universal Church, it is a special feast of our Congregation. In our Founding Constitutions we were named the Sisters of St. Francis, Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. In promoting the veneration of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Mother M. Clara Pfaender was encouraging the Sisters to “seek to grow more and more in holy love.” (FC, CIII)

The images of the Sacred Heart and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary have been part of our long standing Catholic tradition. The images and statues are usually shown with Jesus and Mary pointing to their heart, with a flame above their heart. Over time various presentations and artistic expressions were created around these images. Some may no longer speak to us. We might ask ourselves, why is the focus on their heart?

A Jesuit was presenting images of the Sacred Heart to some school children. He asked the children, “Why do you think Jesus’ heart is shown on the outside of his body?” One girl spoke up: “Because he loves us so much that he can’t keep it in!” For me that says it quite clearly and simply!

Richard Rohr, OFM raises the question as to whether these two images of the Sacred Hearts are objects of worship or symbols of transformation? The heart is seen as the center of our being, of our soul. It is where the Spirit of God dwells. In our first reading today we hear from the book of Ezekiel: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezek 11, 19) This is certainly an expression of transformation, an invitation for us to be open to a change of heart—to a deeper compassion, to total forgiveness, to an all embracing loving acceptance. To be transformed we must let go of what no longer fits our life. We cannot live our new life with our former spirit.

The image of a flame of fire above the Sacred Hearts also speaks to me of transformation. Fire is an image that appears throughout recorded Biblical history. Fire can be destructive; fire can be warming and comforting; fire can represent the presence of the holy. In our recent Pentecost experience, we asked the Spirit to “fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the **fire** of your love.” We were asking that the Spirit stir up the embers of love in our hearts! The flames above the Sacred Hearts point to the intensity of their love burning for us. Did not the disciples on the road to Emmaus, after their encounter with the risen Christ, say “Were not our hearts *burning* within us?” Love lives, thrives and resides deep in the heart. When did your heart last burn within you?

There is a story from the desert fathers...

*ABBA Lot went to see ABBA Joseph and said to him,
“Abba, as far as I can I say my little office, I fast a little,
I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can,
I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?” Then the*

*old man stood up and stretched his hands towards heaven.
His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him,
"If you will, you can become all flame."*

In the light of the events of these past weeks, these past months, how might our heart speak to us in this time of pandemic, of social unrest? How are we being called to hear, to listen in the depths of our heart to what is going on, to get beyond the noise and distractions, to hear the pain, the suffering of our sisters and brothers? Mother Clara Pfaender urges us to have "a heart rich in mercy". (FC, XXVIII). And our Gospel today speaks comforting words, "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..." (Matt 11, 25-29). Perhaps the "yoke" we are being asked to carry today is a new way of carrying the pain of the world.

Yes, the words of the Gospel are comforting and challenging, but not always easy to feel in our heart when we are feeling frustrated or discouraged, and when there is suffering all around us. Finding that place of rest may not come easily. But we are invited and lured into the quiet of our heart, to listen, to rest in God's love, even in the chaos. The love of the Sacred Hearts not only reminds us of the intensity of Christ's love for us, but that same love has a force that unites and gives greater meaning to all our deepest hopes, aspirations and efforts. We are all loved in the heart of God. We are called and touched by that same love, to be a compassionate presence and blessing in the heart of our world today.

May this poem of Emily Dickinson speak to our heart:

*If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain.
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.*

Reflection by Sr. Mary Lou Wirtz