

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus



The Feast of the Sacred Heart

In 1856 Pope Pius IX introduced the Feast of the Sacred Heart into the general calendar of the Roman Catholic Church. It is celebrated on the Friday of the third week after Pentecost.

The Sacred Heart is often depicted with symbols of the passion (encircled by a crown of thorns, pierced by the soldier's lance, the cross and nails) and in flame or radiating light, referencing the revelations to St Margaret Mary.

Origins

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was not invented by Madeleine Sophie Barat!

While it is not found in Scripture, it can be found as early as the second century in the writings of St Justin Martyr. By the Middle Ages the focus of the devotion shifted from the Sacred Heart as a symbol of the sacraments, to being a symbol of divine love.

Revelations to Margaret Mary Alacoque

Later devotion to the Sacred Heart grew in response to a series of revelations received by Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque between 1673 and 1675.

Margaret Mary was a Visitandine Sister living in the Monastery of Paray-le-Monial in France. Jesus appeared to her pointing to His Heart and saying:
"Behold this Heart that has so loved men that it has spared nothing even to exhausting and consuming itself in order to show them its love."

He said that His Heart was "so passionately inflamed with love" that it was unable to contain the flames which must "spread abroad through your means". Jesus asked for a communion of reparation on the First Friday of every month; a weekly holy hour every Thursday; and a special feast in honour of the Heart of Christ on which communion would be offered in reparation for acts of sacrilege committed against the Eucharist.

Berullian Spirituality of the Heart

This tradition of revelations and promises was part of Sophie's religious and political world as she grew up. Mary Brennan RSCJ suggests that the writings of Cardinal Berulle (1575 - 1629) and of Saint John Eudes (1601 - 1680), which were well known in France prior to the Revolution, came to influence Sophie and the Society that she founded more than St Margaret Mary.

Their spirituality of the heart suggested that while the exterior circumstances of Jesus' life were past, the interior state or disposition within Jesus' human soul remains, and this disposition can have an effect on us. Sophie would focus on the inward life of the Sacred Heart, with all its expressions of tenderness, joy and sorrows.



Society of the Sacred Heart

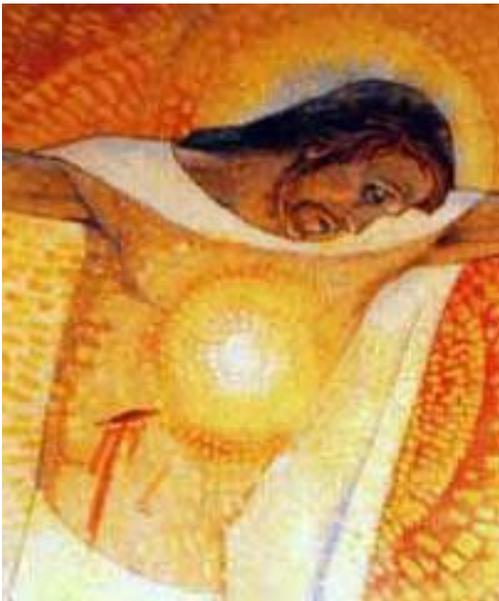
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Rahner

The spirituality and theology of the Heart of Jesus continues to develop. In our times, the insights of the theologian Karl Rahner have been influential.

For Rahner the heart is the symbol of the whole person, the inner centre of a person. The inner centre of a person is expressed through the kinds of intimate, interior activities associated with the human heart, such as longing, choosing, loving, sinning, surrendering. The Sacred Heart of Jesus then symbolises His love of His Father and God's love for us. This love is not romantic or idealistic. It is the courageous surrender of Jesus to the mystery of God in the face of the obscurity of death and the violence of sin.

Reflection from Mary Brennan RSCJ

The Constitutions of the Society of the Sacred Heart say:

“The pierced Heart of Jesus opens our being to the depths of God and to the anguish of humankind. Jesus draws us into His movement of adoration of the Father and love for all, especially those who are poor. We keep returning to this word of Jesus, as to a light which gradually transfigures us in His image: “Learn of Me, because I am gentle and humble of heart.” (Mt 11:29) *Constitutions of 1982, n 8.*”

Reflecting on this passage in 1999, Mary Brennan RSCJ, a theologian of the Australia New Zealand Province, wrote:

“The Heart of Christ was pierced by the soldiers but even more by the violence, injustice, and oppression in the world. This piercing reminds us of all Christ's sufferings. His Heart is, then, a symbol of our woundedness and the wounds and anguish of humanity. In admitting our own weakness, in identifying with others who are suffering, in binding the wounds of others, we are recognising that Jesus is already there with us. It is the Risen Jesus who is with us. In facing up to the evil and the pain and doing what we can to alleviate it, we are at the same time expressing our faith and hope in God's healing, saving action. Only when we have tried to live in love does the Pierced Heart of Christ come to us as a symbol and source of strength, compassion and hope.”

For Reflection

- What does devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus mean to you?
- How does being close to the Heart of Jesus call you to respond to suffering in the world?
- What practices help you to honour and become more attuned to the Heart of Jesus?

References

Brennan, Mary., “How Do Catholics View the Sacred Heart”, unpublished paper, 1999.

Sisters of Reparation to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus
<http://www.sistersofreparation.org/history-of-devotion-to-the-sacred-heart.html>



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