

## THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE EUCHARISTIC HEART FORMS WITNESSES TO LOVE

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Foundress

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In his Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, His Holiness John Paul II invites the entire Church to enter in this Third Millennium with a clear conviction: only those who are witnesses to love will be effective in the New Evangelization. Love is the identity of the Christian who is authentic, and love is the force of all evangelization. In this historical moment the Holy Spirit desires to form great witnesses to love. This love includes the disposition to embrace great sacrifices, to take great risks and to fulfill God's designs of love, designs that are only built upon renunciation and the generosity of donating one's life so that others may have life.

Only this kind of love will heal and restore today's world, converting it into a civilization of love and life. "Only love creates," as St. Maximilian would say.

True love is, in fact, the very heart of the Church because love is born of the Pierced Heart of Christ. Charity is truly the heart of the Church as St. Therese of Lisieux came to understand: "I understood that the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was aflame with Love. I understood that Love alone stirred the members of the Church to act... I understood that Love encompassed all vocations, that Love was everything" (Story of a Soul, as quoted in NMI, 42).

Love must be the origin and the goal of the entire mission of the Church. John Paul II has told us that the greatest challenge of the Church in the Third Millennium is to make the Church "the home and school of love" (cf. NMI, 43). To bring this about, the Church has been invited to prostrate itself before the Eucharistic Christ to learn in the school of His Heart, so we may come to love as He has loved us.

### The Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, School of Love

"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (Jn 13:34). We are called to become like Jesus, to be witnesses of love, loving as He has loved us. He is the supreme model of love, and it is in the likeness of His Heart that we are able to live and to testify to the fullness of love and holiness. "It is he who teaches us that the heart of holiness is love, which leads even to giving our lives for others (cf. Jn 15:13). Therefore, to imitate the holiness of God, as it was made manifest in Jesus Christ his Son, 'is nothing other than to extend in history his love'" (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 30). By being witnesses to love we prolong His love in history.

To love as He has loved us we need to enter into His Heart and to learn from Him the true dimensions of love. We cannot conform ourselves with living less than love, as Saint Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians: Have among you the same sentiments as Christ (cf. 2:5). Similarly, HH Benedict XVI said on May 13th, 2005, "we must be true friends to him, we must have the same perception as he has, we must want what he wants and not what he does not want" (Address to clergy of Rome).

How does Jesus love us? Let us listen to the words of the Sacred Heart to Saint Margaret Mary: "Here is the Heart that has so loved man that it has stopped at nothing to save them." As well, St. John tells us in his Gospel, "Having loved his own, he loved them to the extreme" (cf. 13:1). Loving to the extreme means to stop at nothing, absolutely nothing, in order to manifest His love.

### How did Jesus love us?

In the Heart of Jesus there is only love. Because His Heart is so large, so deep, so wide and so high, He did not possess anything, does not possess anything, and will never possess anything but one Love. His love is born from His holiness, and His holiness is characterized by "simplicity." We are the ones who understand richness as multiplicity, but God's infinite richness is ordered by simplicity and by the indivision of His love. This simplicity of the Heart of the Lord allows His love to be a most rich and universal love that embraces both Heaven, earth, and the entire universe. But it is **only one love** - a love that is tender, passionate, obedient and well-disposed in all things towards the Heavenly Father. Yet at the same time, it is a pure love, abnegated, generous and sacrificial towards men. It is two loves fused into a single love.

Christ loves men and seeks to save them because they are sons and daughters of the Father. He loves the Father so much that He desires to return to Him the love of His children that was lost, and He also desires to manifest to men the love that the Father has for them. "Father, may the love with which you have loved me be in them." (Jn 17:26). He loves the Father, loving and caring for His children. "I protected them in your name that you gave me, and I guarded them" (Jn 17:12).

To love as Jesus loved is to love the Father and humanity with a single love that is undivided and total. In this - the purity of our love - holiness lies. Our struggles, unrest and anxieties are born from the multiplicity of our affections that make war among themselves in our heart. Thus, the first interior process that we must undertake to reach the perfection of love is to tear away from our hearts all that opposes love, all obstacles



that block or destroy the simplicity of love in us. All other affections in the human heart need to be channeled and ordered towards the one and undivided love: love of God and our neighbor.

### **TO LOVE AS JESUS LOVES IS TO LOVE WITH A UNIVERSAL LOVE**

The love of the Heart of Jesus is radically new because it transcends the limits and restrictions that make the idea of love narrow. In the Old Testament, those who were considered to be neighbors were only those who were members of one's nation and faith.

- Christ breaks the barriers of this narrowness in our brotherhood and thus causes a great revolution of love: His love is universal, and His salvation is universal.

- His love is so universal that it does not even exclude His enemies: "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust" (Mt 5:44-45).

Our love has to be like the love of the Heart of Christ: **universal, not excluding anyone**. There cannot be any indifference, coldness, or scorn towards any person, towards any nation, race or religion. The true love of Christians overcomes by doing good to all. Love is the victory over division, animosity, rivalry, competition. Love is the victory over evil. We learn this lesson in the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, who overcomes the sin, rejection and scorn of men, by giving Himself up, donating Himself, voluntarily and freely to save us. **"Only love creates, only love triumphs,"** St. Maximilian Kolbe taught us because **"only love has an invincible potency."** Only the love of Christ is capable of overcoming sin, darkness, and death. Only love is capable of overcoming the culture of death and the selfishness of the modern world.

### **TO LOVE AS JESUS IS TO LOVE WITH A PROFOUND LOVE.**

Jesus loves us so deeply, so passionately that He has us, each one of our names, written upon His Heart. This is why He tells us in the Song of Songs, **"Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm...Deep waters cannot quench love, nor floods sweep it away"** (8:6-7).

Since love was the reason for our salvation, He allowed His Heart to be pierced on the Cross so that His redemptive mission would be culminated with the seal of His love - **the wound of His Heart**. It is in the depth of this wound of His Heart that He has written our names. **"Upon the palms of my hands I have written your name"** (Is. 49:16). **Jesus did not only want our names written on His palms; but he allowed His Heart to be wounded so He could guard us within it.**

"When I receive the Eucharist, it seems to me that I hear the deep pulsing of love of Your Heart, Jesus. It seems to me that I hear how you call me, how you pronounce my name which you bear on the wound of love of Your Heart" (cf. St. Therese of Lisieux, *Story of a Soul*, chap.7). In the school of His Heart, Jesus wants to teach us how to love deeply, how to leave behind so much superficiality. Love ought to enter into the deepest recesses of our being; it ought to be the motivating force behind our very existence. How easily we abandon the path of love because we do not allow it to develop firm roots, to seal the heart, profoundly marking it so that love becomes our identity.

### **THE HEART OF JESUS HAS LOVED US TO THE EXTREME, WITH AN ABNEGATED AND SACRIFICIAL LOVE**

He has loved us to the extreme of giving Himself freely for our salvation. He has stopped at nothing - to the point of giving us His Body, Blood, and His Heart on the Cross - and He continues to do so in the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist is the gift of His self-donation and of His sacrificial love for men. In the Last Supper, Jesus told His apostles and the entire Church until the end of time, **"This is my Body...this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many"** (Mt. 26:27-28). What abnegation, what generosity! Not only did He give His life, but He gave it voluntarily and freely because this is the mark of authentic love. **"I lay down my life...No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own"** (Jn.10:17-18).

The heart that forgets itself is abnegated love, which knows how to suffer for the beloved. **St. Clare of Assisi** said, **"Love that does not know of suffering is not worthy of the name."** Every love must necessarily experience a tearing of the heart if it is authentic. Love involves the immolation of one's desires, of one's will; love involves renunciation, and that is why there is pain. **Abnegation is the donation of oneself for love.** St. Margaret tells us that Jesus revealed to her how, from the moment of the Incarnation, His Heart was marked by the Cross, saying, **"Love and sacrifice were the reason of my Incarnation."**

Generous and sacrificial - this is the love that grows and is fruitful. The more love gives of itself, the more it grows, the more it multiplies, the more it extends. In its very essence, love grows when it is given.

This is precisely what the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus desires to form in us: sacrificial hearts, willing to give one's life for the good of the world and of the Church. To the Venerable Conchita Armida, the great Mexican mystic of the 1920's, the Lord explained, **"I need an army of holy souls transformed in me, who, in becoming living hosts, will offer themselves in complete union with the oblation of Christ to the Father for the good of the world and of the Church."** Conchita prophesied that there would be a second Pentecost so needed in the world, saying, **"This Pentecost will be interior; it will be a powerful transformation of hearts formed in the sacrifice of the Eucharistic Heart."** Love is always offering, and every offering needs to be Eucharistic - that is, like the offering of Jesus.

### **THE HEART OF JESUS FORMS SAINTS AND WITNESSES TO LOVE**

"How the Church rejoices when the hearts of many are enflamed with love for the Heart of Jesus, thereby making witnesses to love!" (cf. John Paul II, June 23, 1985, Angelus reflection).

The Sacred Heart of Jesus is a burning furnace of love, a burning bush aflame with inextinguishable love. He burns us with the love that consumes Him. Love possesses something of the nature of fire: it burns, consumes, illuminates, melts and warms. Jesus in the Eucharist is enflamed with love for our hearts, and that love is what consumes all the things in our hearts that pass away - impurity, selfishness, things that are an impediment to love.

John Paul II in 1985 told us, "Every human heart is called to beat with the rhythm of love; this is how we measure the true dignity and the heights of man" (cf. July 14, Angelus reflection). This measure and height is the one the saints have reached. They have allowed themselves to be enflamed and to be consumed by the fire of the love of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus. They have allowed themselves to be filled with the fullness of love and to be taken to the very heights of love. They have allowed the love of Christ to expand the narrowness of their hearts like we read in Isaiah: "Expand the size of your tents, for you will grow from right to left" (cf. 54:2-3). The Eucharistic Heart of Jesus is the treasure, model, sanctuary and home of the great saints, of the great witnesses of love.

### Witnesses to Love

Saint John wrote, "One of the soldiers pierced His side with a sword and immediately blood and water poured out. An eyewitness has testified and his testimony is true; he knows that he says the truth so that you also will believe" (cf. Jn.19:34-35).

Saint John was a witness to love because he contemplated, because he saw, not only with his eyes, but also with his heart, the mystery of the love of Christ's Heart. There is a manner of "seeing" that only remains on the exterior; there is a "seeing" that is historic, united with the moment in which it is lived, which makes one an eye-witness. However, the witness who is at the same time apostle and disciple is the one who is actually in the historic moment - in the precise hour and place, and for this reason, he is able to contemplate the event with his eyes - but even more so, he is the one who has a heart full of faith which permits him to penetrate the deepest meaning behind the event. Such a one contemplates love and captures its deepest meaning, its redemptive meaning. By contemplating from within and not only from without, he sees the mystery of love and is able to give witness to it with his words, and more importantly, with his life.

Saint John contemplated the Heart that loved humanity to the point of allowing itself to be pierced in order to give life. There at the foot of the Cross, Saint John understood the fruitful dimensions of the sacrificial love of the Heart of Christ, and he became a witness to that love that is stronger than death (Song of Songs 8:6).

It is in this love that the heart of **Saint Rose of Lima** was consumed. Called "the New World's first flower of holiness" in the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* (no.15), she would spend her time with the Eucharistic Jesus, painting her heart with the different features of transformation that were taking place in her as she was exposed to the love of the Heart of Christ. "There I learned to love," St. Rose would say. "There I learned that love consumes and desires to give itself, which is why I must give it to those who suffer, to the sick. I do not fear that my dress will be stained with the wounds of those who suffer, for in this manner I clean the wounds of the Face of Christ."

"How am I not going to give my life for love if the Heart of Jesus gives His love daily in the Eucharist?" **San Martin de Porres** would often say. This awareness that he had of the generous love of Christ in the Eucharist moved him to become a great apostle for the sick. Br. Christopher of Saint John testified that "he would serve the religious who were sick on his knees, attending to them by their bedside at night for weeks, according to the needs he saw they had. He would lift them, lay them down, and clean them, even when their sicknesses were most repulsive.

The power of love of the Sacred Heart formed the missionary heart of **Mother Cabrini** who, moved by this love, went forth, together with the Missionary Order she founded, to America in order to care for the immigrants. "If the Sacred Heart gives me the strength and the means, I will go to distant lands to take the love of Christ to the many who do not know him and who have forgotten Him." The missionary ardor of Mother Cabrini came about after an experience she had in front of the Blessed Sacrament. "The Sacred Heart showed Himself to me and told me, 'Your heart is mine and my heart is yours. From this moment all of your works will be done with the love of my Heart.'" From that moment on, she experienced palpitations in her heart that had no medical explanation.

As he traveled along the many roads of Guatemala professing love, devotion and charity, **Saint Brother Pedro** always demonstrated ardent love for the Heart of Christ. "He is the one who moves my poor heart to love. When I contemplate Him daily in my prayer, seeing how He loves our human misery so intensely, I know I cannot conform myself to anything less than the same." This was the love that moved his social works. The virtue of charity was afire in his heart. He was peaceful, benevolent, meek, and without any guile, pride, ambition, or anger. He suffered with those who were suffering and found joy in truth and justice.

**Saint Teresa of the Andes**, a Carmelite was often enflamed, as she said it, "in the consuming fire of the love of Christ." She desired, in the silence of Carmel, to be a holocaust of love for the Church and the world as was the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus. "I want to proclaim, with my offering and my suffering, the great Gospel of love."

America, the land of lakes, volcanoes, great mountains and beautiful seas, was called in 1992 by John Paul II

the Continent of Hope during the Fifth Centenary of our Evangelization (Oct. 12, Inaugural address to the Bishops during his visit to Santa Domingo, no.27). I remember how those words strongly resonated at the same moment in which the Lighthouse of Columbus was lit and began to illuminate in the dark sky the Sign of the Cross.

America is the Continent of Hope because it is called to form great witnesses of love in the beginning of the Third Millennium. John Paul II urged America to go forward, amidst joys and tears, towards the so desired civilization of love. He urged us to resist the snares of evil and the temptation to violence and to not allow ourselves to be overcome (Message engraved in the Lighthouse of Columbus in Santa Domingo, Oct 12, 1992).

Furthermore, he consistently exhorted us to prepare ourselves for a new evangelization in the loving Heart of Christ, to be witnesses in the world to the fact that Christianity is a religion of love. The Holy Father Benedict XVI, in his encyclical Deus Caritas Est, called us to be witnesses of love, to never forget that love is the essence of being Christians. "Do not forget love" were the last words that St. Maximilian shouted to his brothers as the Nazis were taking him prisoner to the Concentration camp.

As well, in his message for second World Youth Day in 1987, John Paul II said, "The building of a civilization of love requires strong and persevering characters, ready for self-sacrifice and anxious to open up new paths of human coexistence by overcoming divisions and the various forms of materialism. This is a responsibility of the young people of today who will be the men and women of tomorrow, at the dawn of the third Christian millennium."

Father Kentenich, founder of the Shoenstatt Movement, said, "We want to attend the superior school of the Eucharist and learn there what the peak of a growing love should be and how to have a spirit of sacrifice that shows itself in its actions." Furthermore, he said that Jesus desires us first to demonstrate our love for Him by our actions now, while we still have the opportunity to do so.

America, Christian America, Eucharistic and Marian America, now is the best opportunity to be for the entire world, as HH Benedict XVI has asked us, luminous witnesses to love.

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