

11th Sunday of Ordinary Time Weekend “The Sacred Heart of Jesus”

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Cobblestones and horses on narrow crowded streets. Rising above the crowded roofline is a church made in stone and glass. There was no need for watches. The bell tower kept track of time for you. If you were one of the lucky few to be nobility, your life expectancy was 50-60 years. If you were a peasant, your life expectancy was 30-40 years. Sickness and pain were frequent companions. Such was life in medieval Europe into the early modern period. It was during this time of human history that the great cathedrals and basilicas were constructed, reminding us that heaven isn't far away. It was also during these centuries that the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus developed and flourished. Have you ever wondered why?

Margaret was born in 1647 in the small town of L'Hautecour, Burgandy. She struggled with a paralyzing illness throughout her childhood that would often keep her bedridden. She didn't have Netflix, the internet, or video games. However, she did have close relationship with Jesus and would spend much of her day in prayer. So close she was to Jesus, that at a young age she promised him a life of virginity so she could devote herself entirely to him. Her life could have gone several directions as she approached young adulthood. However, it was an intense vision of seeing Jesus suffering that reminded her of her promise to become a sister. As a nun, her visions of Jesus intensified. When she was ready, the Lord revealed to her his Sacred Heart that promises tender love to those who seek his mercy.

She was of course not the first to experience the Sacred Heart of Jesus. St. Bernard of Clairvaux in the 12th century, St. Gertrude and St. Mechtilde in the 13th century stand out as notable examples. St. John Eudes published a book in 1670 entitled “The Devotion to the Adorable Heart of Jesus”. St. Margaret Mary's visions of the Sacred Heart began in 1673 and the devotion spread. In 1856, Pope Pius IX added the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the Church's calendar. It is still celebrated to this day on the Friday following the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

As many of you know, I spent all last week at the June Assembly of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. What is it like, you might ask? Beyond the shock of a cardinal introducing themselves to me in the hallway, as if they need introduction, I'll say this about bishops: We are human. Blessed to be successors of the Apostles, yes, however, every one of us are like you, we are sinners who need Jesus. This weekend, Jesus calls the twelve, to shepherd the New Israel. They had their flaws too. James and John were overly ambitious. Thomas struggled in his faith. Peter denied knowing Jesus three times; not to mention Judas, who ended up betraying Jesus altogether.

The mystery is Jesus stubbornly chooses human beings to sanctify his people. God also doesn't call the equipped, he equips those he calls. The rub is, for it to all work, the called must answer. That is how it is with bishops. That is how it is with all the baptized. I can say this though after attending several of these assemblies so far in the four years I have been a bishop, bishops understand all too clearly the challenges in our church and world today, even if we don't always agree on solutions. Imagine that. However, it was encouraging that we centered our

attention on consecrating the United States this year to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. At the end of the day, that is what bishops and priests do best. For those of us who follow what bishops do, thank you for your prayers.

How does God equip any of us with the grace we need to persevere in our vocations? I think the better question is how do we best open our hearts to the grace God already offers us? The answer it seems is to carve out as much time as we can during the day to simply pray. If you have a stressful job and a tough meeting to walk into, try escaping to someplace quiet and pray beforehand and see how much better that meeting goes as a result. Prove me wrong. If a difficult conversation is needed with a family member, the same thing applies, try carving out time beforehand for prayer, and see how much better that conversation goes. I know that for me to be a good bishop, everything starts with prayer. I believe the same thing applies with every vocation in the life of the Church and life of a family, be it a mom, dad, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, cousin, nephew, niece, the list goes on. This weekend, Jesus calls the twelve, to become spiritual fathers who will shepherd the New Israel. They had their flaws. So do we. However, consider that God wants to sanctify the world around you through you in whatever vocation you are called to. What does that look like for us this coming week? What does it look like to welcome the Sacred Heart of Jesus into our hearts?

My friends, it is tragic how over the years the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus waned in our country. We are far more comfortable and entertained than our medieval counterparts. However, opulence and distractions can also make us spiritually numb, dulling our conscience, and diminish our ability to love others, including the person we see in the mirror. In our moments of hurt and guilt, worry and shame, Jesus stands waiting. The invitation of the US Bishops to renew our devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus this year makes very good sense. With war, poverty, injustice and sin polluting what is beautiful in our world, a renewed devotion to the Sacred Heart is the right medicine at the right time. This is my takeaway from a weeklong meeting with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Along the busy streets of modernity, the Church still rises above the rooflines reminding us of heaven.