

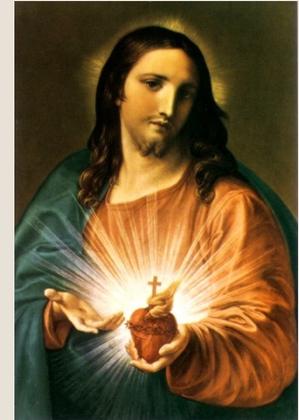
THE HEART OF CHRIST: BURNING FURNACE OF LOVE

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"God is love," the Apostle Saint John exclaimed with ardor in his first letter (v.8). Saint John, the youngest of the disciples of the Lord and known as the "apostle of love," was the last to die. As he got older, his teaching became more and more simple, speaking only of the love of God. According to one tradition, one of his disciples asked him, "Why do not you speak to us of something else?" He responded, "because there is nothing else more important to speak about."



Even though Christianity is complex, containing mysteries and truths which are difficult for the human mind to penetrate, it is also very simple: in the end what we find is the love of God, and all truth leads us there. The love of God is the ultimate cause of all that exists, the ultimate cause of all that happens, and the ultimate cause of our existence. Everything that God has done, He has done out of love; He created us out of love... He sustains us in existence out of love... He seeks us when we walk away from Him out of love... He develops an entire plan of salvation out of love... He became Incarnate out of love... He forgives us and saves us out of love. He suffered His passion and death out of love, and He continues to be Love that searches for us to restore our hearts, to pour forth His graces and mercy, and to elevate us to the dignity of children of God. He seeks our hearts because He loves us. "I sought him whom my heart loves...I will rise then and go about the city... I will seek Him whom my heart loves" (Songs of Songs 3:1-2).

His Holiness, John Paul II, in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, tells us, "*In Jesus Christ God not only speaks to man but also seeks him out.* The Incarnation of the Son of God attests that God goes in search of man...It is a search which *begins in the heart of God* and culminates in the Incarnation of the Word. If God goes in search of man, created in his own image and likeness, he does so because he loves him eternally in the Word, and wishes to raise him in Christ to the dignity of an adoptive son...God seeks man out, moved by his fatherly heart... *Why does God seek man out?* Because man has turned away from him...*Man allowed himself to be led astray* by the enemy of God... Going in search of man through his Son, God wishes to persuade man to abandon the paths of evil which lead him farther and farther afield. 'Making him abandon' those paths...means *overcoming the evil* which is everywhere found in human history. *Overcoming evil: this is the meaning of the Redemption*" (no.7).

God created Adam and Eve for love. They broke this relationship of love with God when they allowed themselves to be seduced by the invitation of the devil: "Do you want to be like God? Do you want to rebel against your status as children? Do you want to break the bonds of love with God because of distrust?" But from the moment of man's fall, God sought to re-establish His relationship with them; He desired to attract them once again to His Fatherly Heart; He promised them a savior. In this same manner God's search for our own hearts begins; in this same manner the covenants and restorations of God's relationship with humanity begin; in this same manner the great adventure of love begins that eventually culminates with the visible manifestation of love on the Cross.

Let us examine some of the major covenants of love that God established with His people in order to bring their hearts back to Him.

- God seeks humanity in the person of Noah. It is a humanity that has become corrupted and deserving of the punishment by flood. One of the faithful families that responded to the call of God is protected from the disaster. It is through this family that future generations will be able to continue. God makes a promise to never annihilate all of humanity with a flood again. His merciful heart chooses instead to protect.
- God seeks humanity through Abraham. He makes a personal alliance with him that will pass on to all his descendants. God wants to reunite a humanity that has become dispersed by the confusion caused at Babel. He wants to form a people, a family that will be faithful and live in holiness, a family who will listen to His revelation. He promises Abraham a fecundity without measure, and He promises to give his descendents the land of Canaan as a possession. God's loving heart chooses to bless.
- God seeks humanity by means of Moses; He frees the people from slavery. The Lord manifests His love by doing many miracles, but the people are not grateful. Nevertheless, God desires to make them into a people who will say "yes" to his mandates, a people that will know Him, love Him, and serve the true God. He desires to give them the Law, the concrete manner by which to live this relationship of love. He wants to instill the Law in them so that it will penetrate the entire religious and moral life of the people. His Heart chooses to reveal the sure path to come to Him.

We could probably go through our entire lives meditating upon all of the loving manifestations of God throughout salvation history. However, despite so much love of God towards men, many times the people of Israel was that unfaithful spouse about whom the prophet Hosea spoke - they turned their hearts away from God and allowed their love to grow cold by loving and serving other gods. But God did not resign Himself to this - which is why we see constant calls, through the mouths of the prophets, to return to Him with their entire heart.

God who is a Father does not resign Himself to losing humanity to the snares of the devil. He does not resign Himself to this because He loves us, because we are His sons, made in His image and likeness. He suffers profoundly from our rebellion and indifference. He suffers because He loves us... but His love is infinite, perfect and merciful, and for this reason, He seeks to attract us to His love.

“When Israel was a child I loved him, out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the farther they went from me...Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms; I drew them with human cords, with bands of love...Yet...they did not know that I was their healer...they refused to repent...Yet, how could I give you up, O Ephraim, or deliver you up, O Israel? I will not give vent to my blazing anger...for I am God” (Hosea 11:1-9).

How much love! Salvation history is all about discovering God’s love for man. He loved them by forgiving them, by speaking to them through the prophets, by making covenants, by correcting, by liberating, by protecting, by revealing His will, by manifesting His providence and His miracles. He did it in so many ways, but His greatest manifestation was the Incarnation, when the Second Person of the Trinity became man. In this act, the One who seeks man - moved by a Heart full of love - became man in order to redeem and transform the hardened heart of humanity with His love, words, works and sacrifices. He became Incarnate in order to seek the heart of man with His own Heart. The purpose of Incarnation and Redemption was precisely that: to enter into a covenant that was heart to heart - because God is the lover of the human heart. He seeks the human heart. Jesus said to St. Gertrude, “Nothing gives me greater joy than the human heart, in which I am so often denied. I have so many things in abundance, yet how much I am denied the love of the human heart” (cf. *The Life and Revelations of St. Gertrude*).

Not only does God love us, but He also wants to clearly reveal that love; He wants us to see it, to touch it, to understand how far it will go. That is why the greatest task of our lives is to come to know the love of God that has been manifested by the Heart of the Son through His life, words, acts, Passion, death and resurrection. Our mission in life is to know God; and by knowing Him, to love Him; and by loving Him, to live out fully the designs of His love for us.

We clearly see the revelation of the mystery of God’s love in the love of the Incarnation, in the love that the Son has for us. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son” (John 3:16); and “in this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10).

“Upon the palms of my hands I have written your name” (Is 49:16). Jesus did not want only our names written on the wounds of His hands, but He also allowed there to be a wound upon His Heart so that He could keep us in it.

For us, the sign of love is the Heart of Jesus, the Heart of God made man. This is why the Heart of Jesus is the place of encounter between two loves - that of Heaven and that of earth. All love must measure and compare itself to the Heart of Jesus to determine its authenticity.

As it is the love of His Heart that moved Him to become Incarnate in order to save us, His mission had to find its culmination in His Heart. This is why the seal of His redemptive sacrifice was the piercing of His Heart. He wrote our names in the open wound of His Heart. The Heart of Jesus is the burning furnace of love. The Heart of Jesus is the sanctuary of love. If we contemplate this Divine Heart, we will see that everything in Him is love. Jesus told Blessed Angela of Foligno, “Look closely at my Heart. Is there anything there that is not love?” We can say that in the Heart of Jesus we find pain, mercy, thorns, the Cross, a sword, purity, humility, docility, etc. All of this is there because it is born of love. Love is the explanation to all that exists in this Divine Heart. It is the fountain of all the virtues because it is a burning furnace of charity.

All that is in the Heart of Jesus is love. And what a manner of love! It is a love unto the extreme. It is a love of the Cross and sacrifice, of self-forgetfulness in order to give us eternal life. How pale is the symbol of love in the world in comparison to the Christian symbol of love that is the Heart of Jesus! For us, the sign of love is the Heart of Jesus, the Heart of God made man.

The Heart of Jesus Burns with Love

Generally, when the Lord reveals His Heart, He manifests it engulfed in flames: “I saw this divine Heart as on a throne of flames, more brilliant than the sun and transparent as crystal” (From a letter of St. Margaret Mary written to Fr. Croiset SJ on November 3, 1689. Found in *The Letters of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque*). To St. Faustina He said, “I am burning in the flames of my mercy and love, which I desire to lavish on souls” (cf. *Diary*, 50). Why fire? Because Jesus is enflamed with love for humanity. His love is so passionate that it is

described in the Song of Songs as “strong as death, relentless as the netherworld” (8:6). His love is a love for the Eternal Father and for man, and it consumes Him. It is this love impassioned for humanity that led Him to give Himself to the extreme for the salvation of man. His love is an inextinguishable furnace. Let us remember what was said in Exodus when Moses received the apparition of God in the form of fire in the midst of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was aflame but was not being consumed (3:2). This is the love of Christ: He reveals to us His burning and flaming Heart, but it is a fire that does not cease; on the contrary, its intensity increases the more we are in need of His forgiveness and mercy.

A burning furnace illuminates the darkness of the night; it warms our body when it is cold. The love of Christ possesses some of the same nature as fire: it burns with ardor, and it burns in order to illuminate the darkness of our hearts and to warm the coldness of our selfishness. It burns with ardor so as to consume the impurities of our hearts and to tear away the stones and the harshness, so as to give us a new Heart similar to His own.

The Lord took St. Margaret’s heart and placed it in His own Heart. The Saint tells us that when her heart touched the flames of the love of the Heart of Jesus, it was consumed immediately by those flames; it seemed as if she were a tiny atom that disappeared in the immensity of Christ’s love. This is what should occur with us. Let us give our hearts to Jesus, allowing Him to consume us, to purify us, to immerse us in His great mercy, to cleanse us and give us a clean heart that is pure, tender, and loving, a heart that knows how to love and, therefore, how to sacrifice itself.

“Behold the Heart which has so loved men that it has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming Itself, in order to testify Its love” (cf. *Autobiography of St. Margaret Mary*). Pius IX in the Beatification decree for St. Margaret said, “The Heart of Jesus is full of such an immense charity that it is inflamed with love for humankind... and we ought to venerate it as the center of Divine Charity.” With his words, the pope wanted to emphasize the message that Jesus gave to Saint Margaret: “My Divine Heart is so inflamed with love for men...that being unable any longer to contain within Itself the flames of Its burning Charity, It must spread them abroad by means of you” (Letter to Fr. Croiset, Nov. 3, 1689). His Heart is the fountain of salvation. His love saves. That is why the false image of love and mercy that has penetrated the minds and hearts of so many in the Church is such a deception. Mercy and love do not leave people in their sin, but they give people life by freeing them from their sins.

THE HEART OF JESUS, SIGN OF SALVATION FOR HUMANITY

Saint Bernard said, “The heart of Jesus was wounded, that through the visible wound, the invisible wound of love might be seen” (As quoted in *Discourse IX Of The Dolours Of Mary* by St. Alphonsus Liguori). In this quotation, he makes reference to the Gospel of John: “One of the soldiers pierced His side with a sword and instantly blood and water poured out” (19:34). In this verse, John is referring to the prophecies of Zechariah that were fulfilled by the piercing of the side of Jesus:

“They shall look upon him who they have pierced (Zec 12:10).

“I will pour out...a spirit of grace and petition (Zec 12:10).

“A fountain shall be opened for all” (cf. Zec 13:1).

From the open fountain of His pierced Heart, Blood and Water flowed out. That is why the Lord revealed two rays in the image of Divine Mercy, a red one and a transparent one.

The Blood

The blood represents sacrifice, the price that He paid to save humanity. In every nation, and principally among the Jews, the blood of victims was sprinkled upon the altar for the expiation and reparation of sin. His Blood comes from His Heart, not only physically but also spiritually. Saint Paul tells us that we were purchased for God with the Blood of Christ. Jesus offered all of His Blood (to the last drop) for our salvation. He gave Himself entirely as a holocaust for our sins. His Blood brings peace. It has an infinite value that supersedes all the debts that man has incurred. The moment that it came forth from His Heart, it became a universal treasury, from which sinners could drink as from a fountain; in this manner, they are able to acquire the life of grace. The Blood of Christ purifies us from our sins and opens the Gates of Heaven.

The Water

The water is the gift of the Spirit obtained by His Heart for all of us. The Holy Spirit comes to purify hearts.

“Jesus stood up and exclaimed, ‘Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink’” (Jn 7:37-39). On this occasion, Jesus presents Himself as the fountain of living water. Just as He had invited those who were labored and burden to find rest (Mt 11:28), here He invites those who are thirsty and who believe in Him to come and drink of the living water that “flows from Him.”

In the Old Testament, messianic times were announced by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which was symbolized by water. The Holy Spirit would be the gift that would actualize the salvation that the Messiah would obtain for all men. The prophet Ezekiel described a river that came forth from the interior of the Temple and brought healing, fruitfulness and abundance of life wherever it passed (47:1-12). As we have already seen, the prophet Zechariah announced a fountain of water that would open one day, bringing freedom from impurities and idolatries.

To the Samaritan women, Christ offered water only He could give - living water that would become a torrent of life and holiness in the interior life of the believer (Jn 4:4-42). In the Feast of the Tabernacles, the Jews

prayed for water. Jesus proclaims that it is only in Him that man finds the water of a new life, and this water comes from Him, from His Heart. In the symbols of these two elements, the Blood and the Water, we discover that the center of man's redemption is found in the Heart of Jesus.

The Wound

The Wound of the Heart of Jesus represents the open door to the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom was closed for us and Christ opened it with His redemptive sacrifice. Through this door, the love of God flows towards humanity, and through this door, humanity enters into the House of the Father. "The true door in which the love of God flows to us is the Heart of Jesus, pierced on the Cross. In it is where we find the Holy Door, the Jubilee Door. Blessed is he, who, having discovered this fountain of love, never separates himself from it. Blessed is he who, drinking from this fountain of love, sees how his thirst grows in the same instant in which it is satiated" (Cardinal Etchegaray, president of the Committee for the Jubilee 2000). As Jesus told St. Faustina, His love is the reason for our redemption: "My Heart overflows with great mercy for souls, and especially for poor sinners. If only they could understand that I am the best of Fathers to them and that it is for them that the Blood and Water flowed from My Heart as from a fount overflowing with mercy" (*Diary*, 367).

Saint John the Apostle, who narrated the piercing of the Heart of Jesus, considered it to be a visible sign of salvation. We must direct ourselves to this fountain of redemption in order to find salvation. The Holy Father, both in Fatima and in his letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, directed our gaze towards the Heart of Christ and told us that by entering the Heart of Christ, we return to the fountain of salvation and thus, enter into the House of the Father (*TMA*, 8).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

How much we are loved by the Heart of Jesus! All of Jesus' preaching can be summarized in the passage of Mark 1:15: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand." Christ wants to manifest what the Kingdom of God is. The Kingdom is the basic concern of the Heart of Jesus because the Kingdom of God is in the heart. It is the reign of love. Jesus wants all of us to participate in the Kingdom and invites us all to it; but He also makes it clear that in order to enter, a conversion of heart is necessary. This conversion consists in a new attitude towards God as Father, a new attitude towards men as our brothers and sisters, and a new attitude towards the things of the world. In other words, it requires a total change of the interior inclinations of the heart.

In His life on earth, Jesus wanted to reveal the kingdom; therefore, He forgave sinners, healed the sick, exorcized those possessed by demons, taught the truth, received those who were rejected, took authority over evil, worked miracles moved by compassion, forgave His enemies, and suffered for us. All of these manifestations revealed the love of His Heart. His Heart is the Kingdom of God. He does not act simply as an agent of the Kingdom, but as its realization. That is why, when He opened His Heart by the piercing of the sword, it became the door of the Heavenly Kingdom opened for us.

The Kingdom of the love of Jesus has no precedents; it is the very love of God for man. This is why His love transcends our capabilities and our limits. We will never comprehend how much He loves us! (As well, the Blessed Mother in Mejugorje told us, "If you knew how much I loved you, you would cry of joy.") The strength that moved Christ in all His actions, words, and sacrifices was love. How many times I have asked myself, "What moved you Jesus to lift yourself up from your falls under such a heavy cross, if what was next was your crucifixion?" I always receive the same answer: "My love for men!"

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LOVE OF THE HEART OF JESUS

Love's ideal is realized in the Heart of Jesus. Outside of this, all other love is imperfect. Human love is full of deficiencies: it is weak, hesitant, selfish, sterile. But in the Heart of Jesus, love is what it ought to be.

It is Faithful

The heart of the history of salvation is the revelation of the faithful love of Yahweh - in other words, the heart of the covenant between God and man is the love of God that is faithful and eternal. The psalmist sings, "His love endures forever" (Ps 107:1). And again, "Praise the Lord, who is so good; God's love endures forever" (Ps 136:1). Many times in the Old Testament, the fidelity of His love was misinterpreted, which led the people to either suffocate love or abuse it. For Judaic legalism, it was very difficult to discover the love of the Law, and hence, they stifled it. For others, the fidelity of God's love led them to forget that love has necessary demands in order that it is not offended.

Jesus' mission is to reveal, fully and definitively, the depth of the love of God. In Christ, God the Father commits Himself to love us forever - not only Israel, but all of humanity. This definitive character of God's love for man reveals itself in the event of the Incarnation: Jesus is the herald of the love of the Father; Jesus is the Incarnation of the love of the Father. The Heart of Jesus is a visible symbol of the love of the Father. This love is revealed fully in the fact that He has become man to save us, and He manifested this love throughout His whole life by His compassion, righteousness, truth, teachings, and miracles - but above all, by His passion and death.

Jesus came as the Good Shepherd, the Bridegroom who heals. Nobody has greater love than he who gives his life for his friends (Jn 15:13). "What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?" (Rom 8:35). This love is not only eternal, but it

also manifests itself in the realities of our lives.

It is Universal

The love of Jesus is radically new because it transcends the limitations and restrictions that narrow the idea of love in the Old Testament. The Law prescribed, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18.). In the Old Testament, one was only required to love only the members of one's own nation and faith. Christ broke these boundaries of restricted brotherhood; with this, He caused a great revolution of love - universal salvation, universal sonship, universal brotherhood, and universal love.

The revolutionary notion of "neighbor" revealed by Jesus appears in many passages. For example, there is the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:29-37). Furthermore, in the Gospel of Matthew even one's enemies are not excluded: "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." (5:44-45). The universality of the love of the Father is revealed clearly, and it becomes the norm for our loving.

It is Compassionate and Merciful

Merciful love forgives and forgets; it descends to the depths, even to the abyss, in order to lift up those who have fallen and sunk down.

In the Old Testament, piety was manifested by hatred towards sinners. Jesus did the opposite: He came to call sinners and not the just, the sick and not those who were healthy (Mk 2:17). We are all sinners and we are all sick. He came to reveal that we were all in need of salvation.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd that goes after the lost sheep. He is the Good Samaritan that heals suffering humanity. He healed many people, freed many who were oppressed by evil spirits, multiplied bread and fish for the hungry and tired, and brought the best out of hardened hearts. He changed water into wine, resurrected the dead, and spoke with women. He had so much compassion for every aspect of misery in the human person. He was moved in the face of human pain. He forgave sins and ate with tax-collectors and sinners. He freed the woman accused of adultery, prevented her stoning, and gave her the grace not to sin again (Jn 8:3-11). The friends of Jesus were people like Mary Magdalene, Matthew, and Zacchaeus; He even called Judas His friend and asked forgiveness for those who crucified Him.

The idea of forgiving sinners was central to the ministry of Jesus. Peter realized this and thus asked Him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Peter was counting, but Jesus was not, and therefore, He answered him, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy times seven" (Matt 18:21-22). Jesus did not come as a judge but as a Savior (Jn 3:17). Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29). He poured out His blood for the remission of sin (Mt 26:28).

The Heart of Jesus is the sign of the new covenant: the new heart, full of merciful love in action.

It is Sacrificial

The love of Jesus is a most sacrificial love, a love that suffers all things through the force of His abnegation; it is such a delicate and tender love that no motherly love can compare to it (Is 49:15). All of Jesus' life was a revelation of His love for the Father and for humanity, but in the final twenty-four hours of His life, this love was manifested in its fullness. We must direct our attention to two places: the Cenacle and Calvary.

Saint John tells that "He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). Before He gave us the new commandment of love with His words, He desired to give it with His own example, with His own suffering, so as to make very clear the nature of the love He was teaching us. This is why He can call us to love as He has loved us. This is why He knelt down and washed the feet of His disciples.

The love He teaches us is a:

1. Love that serves.
2. Love that shows itself in the sacrifices of each day.
3. Love that forgets self in order to give oneself to others.

After humbly serving them, He instituted the Eucharist: the Sacrament of Love, the visible Sign of His self-offering. He gave His Body and His Blood. He gave Himself completely for love. Today He does the same; He remains with us in a real manner and form; He gives us His very Body as our nourishment, completely given for our salvation. It was at that moment that He told them, "As the Father loves me, so I also love you... This is my commandment: love one another as I love you" (Jn 15:9,12). Jesus calls us to love "as He loves us;" in other words, not according to our own measurements and concepts, but rather according to the same sacrificial love and self-offering of His Heart. This is why Saint John tells us in his First Letter, "Whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him" (4:16).

In addition to the two great gifts of the Eucharist and the Commandment to love, Jesus also gave us the following during His last crucial hours:

His friendship

"I no longer call you slaves...I have called you friends" (Jn 15:15). This friendship impels Him to warn us of upcoming persecutions as a result of our friendship with Him, as a result of a world without love (Jn 16:1-4). Moreover, He promises that the presence of the Trinity will come to dwell in our hearts (Jn 14:23) and that the Holy Spirit will guide us to the full truth. (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:15).

His Priestly Prayer

In this prayer, He asks the Father to consecrate us in the Truth and to give us eternal life, to make us perfectly one in mind and heart as a testimony of the love of God.

His Words on the Cross

Destitute of all things, full only of His love for humanity, He gives us His love, expressed in a few words that are full of self-denial: He forgave those who crucified Him; He gave us His Mother to be our Mother; He gave hope to the good thief; He fulfilled the will of the Father; He gave up His spirit into the hands of the Father.

His Pierced Heart

He allowed His Heart to be Pierced so that the Blood and Water could pour forth from it. Not having anywhere to lay His head during His life, He died without ever finding rest. He died loving because He lived loving. This is the love of the Heart of Jesus - a passionate and ardent love that has never been seen before on earth. This is the Heart of Jesus - a burning furnace of charity.

THE HEART OF JESUS, REMEDY OF THE EVILS OF OUR TIME

During a mystical experience, Saint Gertrude asked Saint John why, if he had rested on the chest of the Lord during the Last Supper, did he not write about the depths of His most Sacred Heart. Saint John responded to her, "My ministry in that time in which the Church was being formed consisted in speaking solely upon the Incarnate Word of God. The grace of hearing the eloquent voice of the Heart of Jesus has been reserved for those in the end times. When this voice is heard, the world, being weak in the Love of God, will be renewed, will be lifted from its lethargy, and will be enflamed in the flame of divine love once more." Our Lord tells us through St. Gertrude that the renewal of the world, when it finds itself tired and without fire in its heart, will come by listening to the heartbeats of the Heart of Jesus - the beatings of love.

"Christ offers his human and divine Heart, source of reconciliation and principle of new life in the Holy Spirit, to today's men and women who are immersed in a secularized world and risk losing the centre of gravity in their lives" (John Paul II, Angelus Message, June 28, 1998).

We live in a world that has separated itself from God, and therefore, has lost its center. Everything is altered: faith, relationships with God, morality, family life, the identities of men and women, the values of life, etc. Let us look more in depth at some of these realities and how the Heart of Jesus can remedy them.

1. Lack of Faith - Saint Thomas saw the Heart of Jesus, and this experience penetrated his doubts; he placed his finger in the wound of His Side and thus exclaimed with ardent faith, "My Lord and My God" (Jn 20:28).
2. Lack of Unity - His love brings all creatures to Himself and causes those who believe in Him to have a single mind and a single heart. While hatred divides, separates and destroys, love, on the contrary, unites, brings peace and edifies. This is why only love perfects all things. The essence of mutual love does not consist in the fact that nobody causes us pain - which is impossible while living amongst one another - but rather in learning to forgive with promptness and perfection.
3. Lack of Peace - His Heart is a sign of reconciliation, which is the basis of peace. In His Heart, man finds his weakness and misery, as well as his greatness in being a child of God. Only from His Heart does peace flow. When Christ appeared to the Apostles, He showed them the wound of His Heart and told them, "Peace be with you" (Jn 20:19). Peace is a fruit of the love of His Heart.
4. Abundant Fear - When one is able to contemplate the image of the Merciful Heart of Jesus that pours forth graces and hear within the intimacy of one's soul what St. Faustina heard - "Do not be afraid of anything; I am with you" - he will be able to respond with confidence: "Jesus, I trust in You." This dialogue of the Heart of Christ with the heart of man is based on love, for "there is not fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 Jn 4:18).
5. A Cold World - Coldness is the fruit of selfishness. As iniquity increases, the love of many will grow cold. For this reason, it is necessary in our times to draw close to the flame of ardent love and charity in the Heart of Jesus. The love of Christ does not cease nor deteriorate in any way. His love is eternal. It is the only love that is capable of transforming the world and human life. It is the only love that is capable of causing human hearts to become enflamed with love. "The devotion to my Heart is my last effort to warm a world that has grown cold" (Jesus to St. Margaret).
6. A World in Need of Love - "God has made us for Himself [*He created us for love, to love and to be loved*], and our hearts are restless until they rest in Him" (St. Augustine, *Confessions*. Italics added). Love is the force behind our existence. This means that the fullness and maturity of our humanity is reached to the extent that we experience the love of God, that we know and believe we are loved by Him, and that we love others. The human heart is always hungry and thirsty for love. Its greatest desire is love. Therefore, if we do not live in love, our hearts are robbed of its greatest desire. Our full human development - on all levels, not only the spiritual - is reached to the extent that the human person

experiences love. It is a grave error to think that we reach this fulfillment outside of love. Selfishness robs us of our dignity and leaves us in a state of immaturity. There is no fulfillment outside of love. Our dignity is found in being children of God; therefore, we live in and for love. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 Jn 3:1).

7. An Empirical and Rationalistic World - We live in a world that rejects what is supernatural and denies the divinity of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Church. As a consequence, it proclaims indifference in matters of faith and religion, independence of thought, and the autonomy to decide what is good and evil.

However, when we contemplate the Heart of Jesus, we discover the contrary. We discover the Heart of God-made-man who entered in direct relationship with humanity. We discover the Pierced Heart of God - from which the Church was born - robed in divine strength and with a supernatural power that has the life of the souls and of societies within it. Because of this, Pope Pius IX consistently told the Church that the Sacred Heart of our Lord was the remedy destined to save the world.

Contrary to the spirit of pride so prevalent in the world, the Sacred Heart shines with humility. Contrary to the spirit of independence, the Sacred Heart submits in obedience. Contrary to the spirit of weakness that serves the values of the world, the Sacred Heart remains firm and strong.

The Heart of Jesus - burning furnace of charity, fountain of salvation, abundant fountain of grace and salvation - is our hope! The hope of humanity!

My brothers and sisters, let us lift up very high above humanity the Heart of Jesus, through which humanity is redeemed and transformed. May we all enter through the wound of His Side to live in the Heart of Christ and in this way, consumed by the fire of His love, may we one day come to burn so brightly with love that we enflame the world today that is so in need of a new civilization and culture of love.

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