

July 15, 2018

How to Conquer the Hardness of Our Hearts

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Over the last two months, I have had plenty of time to read, reflect, and pray. I would like to share with you one special prayer that touched my heart. It was written by St. Claude de la Colombiere, who lived over 300 years ago and helped promote the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as he became the spiritual Director of St. Margaret Mary. St. Margaret Mary had the vision of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in her monastery at Paray-le-Monial:

"O God, what will you do to **conquer the fearful hardness of our hearts?**

- Lord, you must give us new hearts, tender hearts, sensitive hearts, to replace hearts that are made of marble and bronze.
- You must give us your own heart, Jesus. Come, lovable heart of Jesus.
- Place your heart deep in the center of our hearts and rekindle in each heart a **flame of love** as strong, as great, as the sum of all the reasons that I have for **loving you, My God.**
- Holy Heart of Jesus, dwell hidden in my heart so that **I may live only in you and only for you** so that, in the end, **I may live with you eternally in heaven!** "

I discovered the above prayer in a reflection booklet by Fr. Timothy Brown, Jesuit, on the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. That booklet was passed on to me by a priest-friend who said to me that I may find it helpful for my on-going recovery. Fr. Timothy wrote it after having had angioplasty surgery. In the introduction, he wrote, "*Arteries supply a constant flow of oxygen enriching blood to the heart. When arteries are healthy, the smooth inner lining allows blood to flow freely to the heart, supplying it with nutrients amid oxygen. But arteries begin to get clogged. They narrow to the point where the blood flow is impeded... Angioplasty procedure was developed to remove the built up plaque...it widens and dilates the blocked arteries.*" This procedure saved my life. I see this booklet as a **reflection on healing:** the "*opening of all the blocked spiritual arteries of the past years.*"

Three of my own arteries were so clogged that the angioplasty procedure that saved Fr. Timothy's life did not work. I needed to have immediate triple bypass surgery; much more complex, (opening of the sternum, bypassing the blocked arteries using a vein from my leg), yet has the same effect allowing oxygenated blood to the heart muscle. In the past, I have often used the analogy of hardened hearts, but never the analogy of clogged arteries. St. Claude de la Colombiere in the above prayer talks about how to conquer the



hardness of our hearts. He does not talk about the hardness of our clogged arteries. However, his prayer can be extended to use both analogies.

The invitation is always there for us to **open our hearts to the Holy Spirit**, which is the **flame of love** St. Claude de la Colombiere talks about. Fr. Timothy Brown invites all of us to open up all our blocked spiritual arteries of the past years. Yes, we need to open our spiritual hearts to the **Holy Spirit**. That includes opening and cleaning **all the channels that feed into our spiritual hearts**. It is our sinfulness which clogs our spiritual arteries. Like Adam and Eve, **pride** is our greatest sin, which leads us to many other sins; so, let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us imitate Jesus, who invites all of us "*Come to me, all you who labor and are wearied, and I will give you rest...Take my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.*" (Matthew 11:28-29).

Unless we deepen our personal relationship with God through prayer and reflection (daily examination of St. Ignatius of Loyola), unless we become more aware of our sins, and unless we participate more frequently in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, our spiritual hearts will lack spiritual oxygen. At times, we may need a more radical, systematic intervention, like an angioplasty or open heart surgery. Such intervention will vary depending on our own individual situations. It will mean to deepen our faith through participating in regular scripture prayer, or participating in spiritual retreats every year, or through attending faith formation programs like the ones offered at OLHOC.

As we continue our **Journey of Faith** together in this **Year of the Holy Spirit**, I invite each of us to reflect on our own relationship with the Holy Spirit. Does our relationship with the Holy Spirit help transform our hearts of marble and bronze into new, tender and sensitive hearts? Does our relationship with the Holy Spirit help us to open up our blocked spiritual arteries? Let us keep in our minds the image of the Holy Heart of Jesus hidden in our own hearts so that we may live only in Jesus and only for Him! This implies our total consecration to Jesus: Jesus, I am totally yours! Everything I do is in You and for You!

Following the example of St. Louis Montfort, we are all encouraged to renew our Consecration to Jesus through Mary. Our next opportunity is on the Feast of the Assumption (August 15). In preparation, OLHOC Marian group members began the 33 Days to Morning Glory prayer this past Friday (just as we did last April/May). I invite you to **catch up** and follow these Days to Morning Glory with me.

Come Holy Spirit! Open our hearts to the hearts of Jesus and Mary! Make us one in Jesus and Mary! Guide our steps and decisions on our journey of faith!

**One in Christ,
Fr. Alain**

