

The Sacred Heart

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 5, 2020

Fr. Tony Davis

A few weeks ago, we celebrated the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The image of the Sacred Heart usually features Jesus wearing red and pointing towards his heart, which is visible through his garments. His heart is often glowing and has a crown of thorns around it, a reminder of his crucifixion. It is a very traditional devotion that still has much value for our contemporary society.

Today's Gospel references the heart of Jesus. In it, Jesus simply and profoundly says, "for I am meek and humble of heart." As foretold by the prophet Zechariah in our First Reading, the king who was to come into the world would be a totally different sort of king. He would be meek and riding not in a chariot or on a horse, but on a donkey. Instead of relying on a warrior's bow, he would proclaim peace to the nations and non-violent means of resistance. Zechariah was right; the king would be meek and humble of heart.

The 20th century Jesuit priest, Teilhard de Chardin, had a mystical vision one day while reflecting upon the image of the Sacred Heart while in a church. I want to read some of his account at length:

"as I allowed my gaze to wander over the figure's outlines I suddenly became aware that these were *melting away*: they were dissolving, but in a special manner, hard to describe in words. When I tried to hold in my gaze the outline of the figure of Christ it seemed to me to be clearly defined: but then, if I let this effort relax, at once these contours, and the folds of Christ's garment,

the luster of his hair and the bloom of his flesh, all seemed to merge as it were (though without vanishing away) into the rest of the picture. It was as though the planes which marked off the figure of Christ from the world surrounding it were melting into a single vibrant surface whereon all demarcations vanished.... All this movement seemed to emanate from Christ, and above all from his heart.” (42-44) ... “In an instant my eyes were bedimmed with tears. And then, when I was once again able to look at it, the painting of Christ on the church wall had assumed once again its too precise definition and its fixity of feature.” (*Hymn of the Universe*, 46)

I think this mystical vision was divinely inspired because it puts a heart at the center of the universe. A heart is fundamentally relational. It connects us to God, others, and creation. A heart is vital to life. It keeps us alive as it pumps blood through our bodies. A heart is warm. It overcomes cold knowledge, abstract theories, and indifferent behavior. And, as Teilhard’s mystical vision demonstrated, a heart can expand. It can reach beyond itself and overcome all the lines and demarcations that divide the world.

The expanding heart of Christ is at the center of the universe.

Do I see all things and all people within the all-encompassing heart of our Lord?

The next time we see the image of the Sacred Heart, let us remember that it is so much more than a devotional picture. It is the image of a heart that expands, blurs lines, and most importantly, is meek and humble.