

As my grandmother prepared for death in her final hours, she gazed up at an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In her 90's with a frail and worn-out body, Fr Frank came by to offer her the sacraments of the church and he recognized the final hours were upon her. With medication to ease the pain, my grandmother Raffaella should have been unconscious. Instead, she was alert to the presence of God in her final moments. It is as if she looked beyond the image on the wall and had a true encounter with the risen Christ inviting her to let go of everything in this world and to join the angels and saints in heaven in praise and worship of our triune God.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus is filled with love and mercy. Pope Benedict reminds us that “the deepest expression of God’s love is found in the gift Christ made of his life for us on the Cross, the deepest expression of God’s love, it is above all by looking at his suffering and his death that we can see God’s infinite love for us more and more clearly.”ⁱ It comes as no surprise that the Sacred Heart of Jesus reaches out to those near death.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus also reaches out to those in prayer and devotion to God. A few years ago, a woman approached me after Mass and told me of her time before the Blessed Sacrament. She was concerned for her father and his health but also assured through the Sacred Heart of Jesus weeks in advance that a near death experience would not lead to death but to a stronger faith for her father. I met her as her father lay in very serious condition at the hospital. Many of our parishioners joined in prayer to the Sacred heart of Jesus. God’s healing touch and the skill of local doctors and nurses helped her father to regain his health, to rise again and to return home. Louis and his wife Marge are devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus year-round. “In the Heart of Christ, man's heart learns to know the genuine and unique meaning of his life and of his destiny, to understand the value of an authentically Christian life, to keep himself from certain perversions of the human heart, and to unite the filial love for God and the love of neighbor” (JP II).ⁱⁱ

At times, the Sacred Heart of Jesus is a lonely heart. In our Gospel reading, Jesus pours out his blood for us from the cross. The Blessed Mother and the Beloved Disciple are witnesses, but Peter and the others have abandoned Jesus. In his hour of greatest torment, the physical wounds were compounded by the spiritual abandonment of those he was closest to. “When the divine Redeemer was hanging on the Cross, He showed that His Heart was strongly moved by different emotions - burning love, desolation, pity, longing desire, unruffled peace. The words spoken plainly indicate these emotions:”ⁱⁱⁱ

- “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do!” (Lk 23:34).
- “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mt 27:46).
- “Amen, I say to you, this day you shall be with Me in paradise” (Lk 23:43).
- “I thirst” (Jn 19:28).
- “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit” (Lk 23:46).

“Thus the love of Jesus Christ the Son of God, by the sacrifice of Golgotha, cast a flood of light on the meaning of the love of God Himself: ‘In this we know the charity of God, because He has laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren’ (1 Jn 3:16). And in truth it was more by love than by the violence of the executioners that our divine Redeemer was fixed to the Cross”^{iv}

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is a devotion to love. Jesus points to his heart surrounded by a crown of thorns. “Fixing our gaze on the Lord, who ‘took our infirmities and bore our diseases’ (Mt 8: 17), helps us to become more attentive to the suffering and need of others.”^v As we gaze ourselves on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we are reminded of the two greatest commandments. “You shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength” (Dt 6:5). The second greatest commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mk 12:31).

ⁱ vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20060515_50-haurietis-aquas.html

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_15051956_haurietis-aquas.html #68

^{iv} Ibid #70.

^v vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20060515_50-haurietis-aquas.html