



# HEARTS ON FIRE

## WE PREACH LOVE - RULE OF LIFE #25

MARCH 2025 ISSUE 1



### A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON POPE FRANCIS' ENCYCLICAL DILEXIT NOS (HE LOVED US)

Pope Francis' encyclical covers so much about the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He makes many different points; I can only write of the impression it left on me. That is: if we are to consider Jesus' heart, we must realize that it is never self-contained. His Heart is alive and pierced open, and the love within it seeks to extend and reach each and every last individual person. We are each only created for His love.

The extension of love: this is Jesus' heart. For me, the document feels missionary by its nature, as if to inspire each of us to throw ourselves immediately into the movement of Christ's love, which passionately flows in all directions and toward all people.

As a priest, I sometimes feel poor in my attempts to counsel and preach. How often I wonder what I could possibly say to allow people to really experience this love of Christ. Near the end of his encyclical, Pope Francis writes with such simplicity: "Our best response to the love of Christ's heart is to love our brothers and sisters."

The Holy Father challenges me to approach every moment of ministry as an opportunity to extend Christ's love, and to realize that this is enough. Not to strive to counsel people perfectly, which I could never do, but to be a Good Samaritan, offering my time, my heart, my resources, and simple presence. If there's love in my heart for the person before me, then that is how Christ stands and delivers. The Good Father and Mother were clear that one of the reasons they felt our Congregation exists is to repair the outrages against Christ's Sacred Heart. What could be more outrageous to him than the fact that so many people feel unloved. This is the radical privilege of being a Picpus: to help them realize how loved they are indeed.

Fr. John Sawchenko, SS.CC., Harlingen, TX.

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TEACHER TO PUPIL:

DO YOU HAVE A DATE FOR VALENTINE'S DAY

PUPIL - YES MISS, FEBRUARY 14TH!!

Fr. John Roche, ss.cc.

## IMMERSED IN THE HEART OF CHRIST

I went to Mexico for language immersion and received an immersion of the heart. Here is my reflection on *el Sagrado Corazón de Jesús* in this *rico y bendecido* time.

Fraternity/ Community: "We have a heart, a heart that coexists with other hearts that help to make it a 'Thou.'" (Pope Francis "Dilexit Nos, # 12).

Los hermanos took me in right away, welcoming me to their communal life of prayer, table fellowship, and ministry. We had breakfast and lunch together most days- with Vero our cook often joining us. I stayed at the *Preciosísima Sangre* rectory with four brothers: the new provincial Fr. Rodrigo, pastor of *Preciosísima Sangre*, Fr. Camilo, sports enthusiast who sings beautifully at mass in his mellifluous tenor voice, Fr. Heriberto Bravo Bravo, poet, and Fr. Alejandro, from the South of Mexico and pastor of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*. I was happy to hear of connections with the brothers with our brothers and parishioners in the U.S., like Lupita de la Cruz who has served at Sacred Heart in Edinburg for 58 years! The Mexican brothers and the parishioners looked after me, and were patient with my Spanish.

When I arrived, there were questions about Pres. Trump and the deportations. I explained my empathy for the immigrants, and was very grateful when the Pope's letter to the U.S. bishops came out. How odd it felt to be so welcomed while immigrants were being threatened and arrested in the U.S.



*Despedida : Padres Rodrigo, Bill, Camilo, and Alejandro*

**Faith:** It was beautiful to see the faith alive in the people of Mexico, from the streams of pilgrims coming to our Lady of Guadalupe by foot, motorbike, or truck convoys.



How powerful and lovely to walk through the Holy Door and pray with the pilgrims, and ascend the hill of Tepeyac in the footsteps of San Juan Diego! So many of the faithful crowded into the parish on feast of the Presentation of Our Lord, and have their Niño Dios (doll) and velas (candles) blessed.

It was a joy to meet parishioners like sacristan Enrique who served at most of the masses and climbed the stairs to the roof to ring the church bells three times, calling the faithful to the masses, Alma a faithful lector, and an altar server Carol - named for Pope St. John Paul II- who also served at most Sunday masses with great gusto. I had to work to follow her bubbly Spanish. There was all Night Adoration on the first Saturday of the month with a handful of parishioners sleeping on the floor, taking turns worshipping the Lord. In his encyclical "Dilexit Nos" Pope Francis quotes St. John Henry Cardinal Newman to describe the Sacred Heart of Jesus: "Cor ad cor loquitur / he speaks heart to heart".

Even one of the teachers from the secular language school went at length to explain how the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe fulfilled Aztec prophesies of divinity.

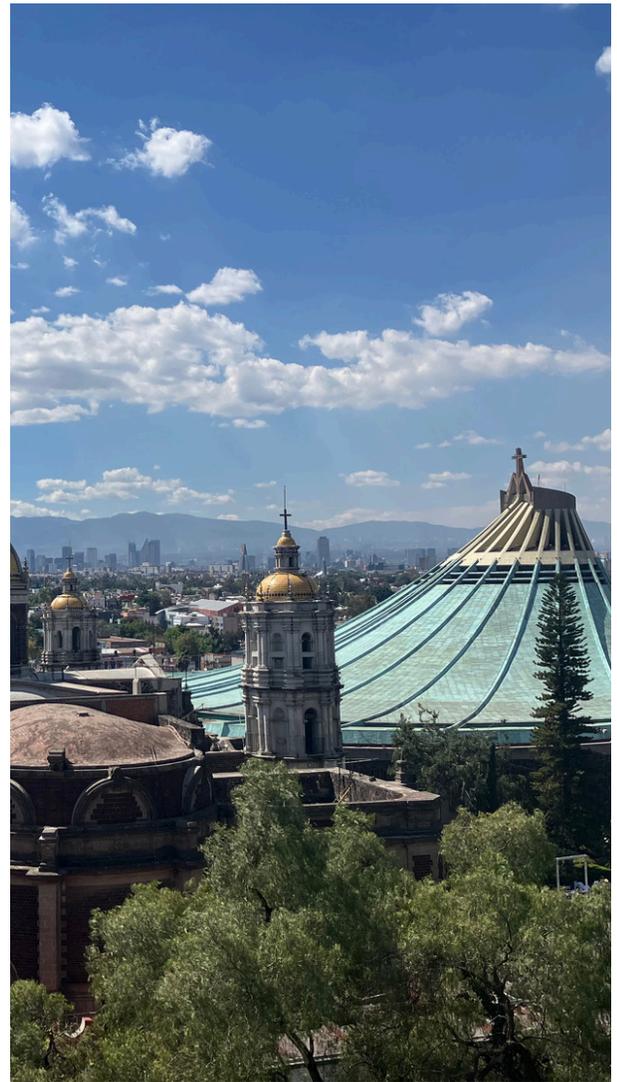
**Humility:** “I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for yourselves” (Mt. 11:29). I was touched by the Mexican people’s humility, as they went about caring for their families, doing many very mundane jobs as the countless street vendors who set up their stands every morning, and praying and serving with simplicity and trust. Strangers helped me with directions, a teen offered me her seat on the Metro, parishioners asked for blessings and even confessions (during mass). So many were living with joy and gratitude the model given to them by *la Morena, la Virgenicita de Guadalupe*.

**Service:** “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve”(Mk. 10:45).

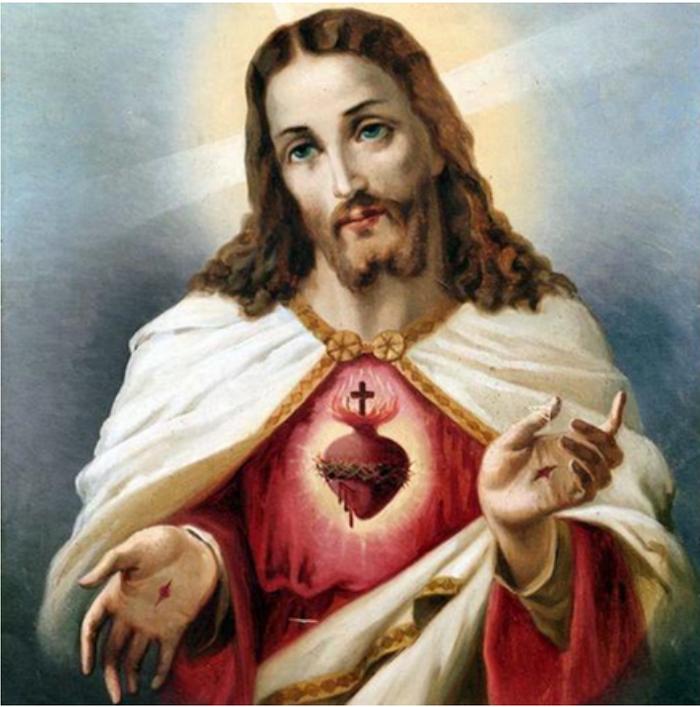
I felt the love of the heart of God in so many ways- in experiencing the generosity and beauty of the people and this place, with its blend of indigenous culture, Catholic and colonial, and modernism like Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, in witnessing the love of people- especially for the young, elders and vulnerable people, the many people assisting and participating in the masses and other worship. I was blessed to serve a little at two of the parishes which opened my heart to God’s loving initiatives.

“I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (DN, quoting Zech. 12:10). *Gracias a Dios y México!*

Fr. Bill Gural, SS.CC.  
La Verne, CA



*Mural by a SS.CC. priest, Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*



## THOUGHTS OF THE HEART

The old clock on the wall struck nine as we gathered around the family fire and slurped down our final meal of the day, a mug of hot stirabout, known elsewhere as porridge or oatmeal, a product of the local mill. Now replenished for the long and cold winter's night, Dad would then say, "It's time to say the rosary." He had every right to say that because he was not only the man of the house, but also a member of the parish Sodality of the Sacred Heart.

The voice had spoken. So, we all got down on our knees, using the chair we had been sitting on as a prop, not unlike some use the pew in church. Then my father would lead the beads and we all responded as best we could, depending on our stage of wakefulness. On the wall above us hung a beautiful picture the Sacred Heart, and he looking down on us with watchful eyes. Under the picture was a shelf and on it sat a tiny kerosene lamp with a red globe. God forgive those agents of progress who replaced that little lamp in the nineteen fifties with a red bulb. That little lamp had also been our night light in those times.

After we had said our prayers it was off to bed for us kids, me and my brothers all in the same bed, my older brother on the outside, myself on the inside and my younger brother in the middle. A small enough bed it was for the three of us. When one of us wanted to turn, we all had to turn. In spite of that, we all got a good sleep without much kicking and I want you all to know that I was a pretty good football kicker in my time.

We were not the most pious family in that village in County Galway, but we were a normal Catholic family in the parish church dedicated to who else but Saint Patrick. Dad worked the small farm and was always the first up and out of bed in the morning and started the fire to warm the house for us. Mam ran the household and got us breakfast and off to school on time. Then she spent the rest of the day cooking and cleaning and doing all those many unnamed chores. It was no wonder then that she sometimes dozed off during the praying of the rosary prompting my Dad to say, "Arrah wake up, Mary."

Yes, we were a normal Irish family with a great devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the Blessed Mother. Oh yes, we went to church every Sunday without any hassle. My dad went to the early Mass. I usually went to the later Mass and afterwards enjoyed a large six penny ice cream from Hynes' shop. Thank the Good Lord for ice cream. I wonder whether Jesus got to sample a cone in his day.

Now I wonder if Fr. Bill Gural is shaking his head after reading these lines of an Irish story. I hope he did not expect a treatise on Devotion to the Sacred Heart. If so, he must be disappointed. My sister, a Mercy Sister had our home consecrated to the Sacred Heart while I was away in the Sacred Hearts Seminary. That was good enough for me. Glory to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Fr. Pat Killilea ss.cc.  
St. Francis Church, Kalaupapa

## TWO SPIRITUAL CURRENTS

"The law of what is prayed [is] the law of what is believed" (Lex Orandi; Lex Credendi [in Latin]) This maxim was used as a tool repeatedly by teachers and formators of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in 1960 and onward. Liturgical worship (prayer) is not an "add on" in our Catholic tradition. Worship (prayer) reveals what we truly believe and how we view ourselves in relationship to God, one another and the world into which we are sent to carry forward the mission of Jesus the Christ.

When we participate in the Liturgy of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the preface of the Mass uses these words: "It is truly right and just, our duty and...raised up high on the Cross, he gave himself up for us with a wonderful love and poured out blood and water from his pierced side, the wellspring of the Church's Sacraments, so that, won over to the open heart of the Savior, all might draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation."

Two spiritual currents go hand-in-hand: the Heart of Jesus is, a source of the sacraments and a source of grace (so that the access to grace isn't seen as a kind of magic, but rather as a direct relationship of friendship with Him).

Saint Bonaventure unites these two spiritual currents. He presents the heart of Jesus the Christ as the source of the sacraments and of grace, and urges that our contemplation of that heart become a relationship between friends, a personal encounter of love.

Dilexit Nos [DN] 106

The two spiritual currents, sacraments and grace, are powerful tools that repair the multitude of broken relationships that we experience in our broken world. In his recent encyclical *Dilexit Nos* Pope Francis says, "...fraternal love by which we heal the wounds of the Church and of the world." Pope Francis further says "In this way, we offer the healing power of the heart of Christ new ways of expressing itself." [DN 200]

New ways of expressing the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus can be focused on the healing that takes place in the sacraments and can be experienced by the overflowing grace that our tender and loving God grants. Two sets of words used in the sacraments give powerful affirmation: 1). "Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be **healed**". 2). "Lord, Jesus Christ, you chose to share our human nature, to redeem all people and to **heal** the sick. Look with compassion upon your servants whom we have anointed in your name with this holy oil for the **healing** of their body and spirit..."

Fr. Clyde Guerreiro, ss.cc.  
Parochial Vicar, St. Augustine by the Sea, Waikiki,  
Honolulu, HI

Thank you to Gabriella Robledo, Br. Marc Roque, SS.CC. and Br. Emmanuelle del Castillo, SS.CC., all the contributions, and Fr. Lane Akiona, SS.CC., Provincial.



**The Secular Branch members of the Region of California were asked to reflect and share on the meaning of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to them. Here are some responses:**

1. What the Sacred Heart meant for me as a Secular member, is the unconditional love of Jesus for all of us. We have to reflect on our life and ask ourselves what we can do for Jesus in return for His love for all of us.

2. Sacred Heart of Jesus symbolizes His love, His Mercy and compassion for me and to all mankind.

3. Sacred Heart represents for me a community of people who love to share about God (which gladly there is one close to me to be part of) and the sacred heart of Jesus and his merciful people.

4. As a Secular Branch member, the Sacred Heart means love of Jesus and Mary; it also transmits this love to the community uniting us all.

5, Prayer of Daily Neglects we offer to the Eternal Father the Sacred heart of Jesus says "with all its love, all its suffering and all its merits. Therefore; All treasures come from his merciful heart. Heart of Jesus help me!"

6. The Sacred Heart means to me Jesus of Nazareth. The human Jesus. His love for humanity. He is down to earth, and approachable. His beating heart is exposed, shows me he is all love. I find him in adoration, where he pours out intense love for all mankind.

7. In the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I am reminded of his profound love for me. He invites me to come to Him where we can find rest. His heart offers me love, peace, joy, suffering. Through his heart, I feel assured of finding hope and guidance. He is always there for me and wants me to love Him. His Sacred Heart also invites me to pray and offer sacrifices for the salvation of others just like he modeled by his death on the Cross.

8. As a SSCC Secular Branch member, the Sacred Heart of Jesus means not only knowing of and receiving God's love, which is the breath of our existence, but also desiring to reciprocate that Divine love in thought, word, and action. Though we are sinners, our hearts are fused. My imperfect self desires to bring consolation to His Sacred Heart. My hope is that my flawed actions are transcended by His abundant Mercy, Grace and Love. May my heart always beat for you dear God. May our hearts always beat as one. I love you God.

9. The Sacred Heart of Jesus has been my refuge where I could confide all my joys, sorrows, worries, fears, pain, sufferings, my feelings without reservations. It is my confidante where I could express myself freely. I hide in the deepest wounds of His Sacred Heart to find rest, peace, solace, comfort, trust and most importantly love. Being enclosed in the deepest wounds of his Sacred Heart is like hiding in a very secure place feeling his protection and hugs as it beats my heart beats with his. My pains, sorrows and sufferings are washed away by his Most Precious Blood as though as I am being purified as gold in the furnace by his consuming fire of love.

Over the years of being a Secular Branch, I have grown in his presence especially in the union of His love in the Holy Eucharist, in adoration, in uniting with His passion making reparations for my sins and that of humanity, past, present and future. Jesus meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine. FIAT! To the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, honor and glory. Amen.

# "A Broken Child."

In the sketching, a scene unfolds,  
A girl in sorrow with her heart turned cold,  
A man beside her with hands so kind,  
Offering solace, a gentle find.

Her head in her knees, with tears fall like rain,  
As he holds her hands, and soothes her pain.  
The pen that drew them, a tool of art,  
A symbol of hope, a gentle start.

In this moment, a connection is made,  
A bond of kindness, a heart not afraid.  
The girl's sorrow, slowly starts to fade,  
As the man's compassion, her heart has stayed.

A beautiful moment, a work of art,  
A reminder of kindness, a gentle start.

- John Vitolio

*John Vitolio*

10/04/24



Br. John Vitolio, ss.cc.  
Seminarian  
Pacific Regional Seminary  
Suva, Fiji

# WHICH WAY RELIGIOUS LIFE?

An Interview with Fr. Stephen Banjare, ssc

By Fr. David Lupo, ss.cc.

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## **DL. Tell us about yourself.**

I am Fr. Stephen Banjare, ss.cc. and I come from a farmer's family in India. I have two brothers and three sisters. I am the third. My father is enjoying the eternal embrace of God while my mother enjoys good health, living with my older brother and family in Chhattisgarh, the Indian state from which I come.

I am a convert as I was born in a Hindu family. Growing up, I had no knowledge of Jesus and Christianity at all. We know and believe that God works in a very mysterious way. He did in my life without a doubt. In Isaiah 55:8 we read, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. We read again in 1 Corinthians 2:11- "no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." I firmly believe that I am God's work. He has called me and I have responded to His call with His grace and strength and I continue to do so with my weakness and His grace. So, here I am. At a very early age (about 11-12) though I was a Hindu, I felt being called to a priesthood. So, I was baptized at the age of 20 and joined the seminary for the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary at the age of 22. I did my minor seminary studies and pre-novitiate in Kolkata, philosophical studies at St. Charles Seminary, Nagpur, Maharashtra.

I went to the Philippines for my novitiate and completed my theological studies there. I took my first profession of Religious Vows on May 10, 2003. I was sent to London for my pastoral year where I was ordained a Deacon. I was ordained a priest at St. Mary's Church Kolkata on April 28, 2008. I worked in India as an associate pastor for one year in Dum Dum, West Bengal and the following year I was made administrator of another parish in Serampore, West Bengal. I was the Director of Damien Social Development Institute where we served the people affected with leprosy as well as the poor people and people at the margins. I came to the USA in 2016 and was assigned to St. Joseph's Parish, Fairhaven, MA as a parochial vicar and after a year I was made a Pastor of the same parish. Recently I was transferred to St. Ann Kaneohe, Hawaii as a pastor. There I served only 10 months till I was elected as one of the General Councilors for the Congregation.

I have been blessed to serve the Congregation in various capacities such as treasurer and being part of the Regional Leadership, India as well as the Provincial Leadership USA and now I am honored and humbled to be part of our General Government of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts in Rome.

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**DL: Well, ciao, Padre Banjare! Buon Giorno, and all that. How are you settling in the Eternal City? Any sightseeing?**

SB: Buon Giorno Padre Davide! I arrived here in the Eternal City of Rome on December 1, 2024 and so far, I am doing well. It has been a huge change in my life, coming from a pastoral field to the administration at the highest level of the Congregation. I do miss parish work, but I am adjusting my life here slowly. Things are quite different here. We are 10 in the community here in the General House. Totally an international community! Language is a challenge at this moment. The brothers in the General House have been so wonderful and helpful in every way.

They make you feel at home right away and I feel so blessed. I had been to Rome a couple of times before this assignment, so I have seen some places. I have not gone for any sightseeing after my arrival. However, I was blessed to attend and experience the consistory at St. Peter's Basilica, where we also had the privilege to meet many Cardinals from around the world. We went to Assisi for three days of prayer, reflection, discernment. and decision as a leadership team. I had the opportunity to go around Assisi and visit various basilicas, cathedrals and churches there.

**DL- Yeah, was it quite a shock to go from delegate to General Councilor? How are you doing with the languages?**

SB -No, it wasn't really a shock for me as some of our priests had already anticipated and told me about the possibility of my being elected as a General Councilor. Since this was my very first Chapter, I was curious to experience the dynamics of a General Chapter and that's it. I neither thought nor was keen to be elected. I tried my best to avoid all the possibilities of being elected. I even withdrew my name from the nomination, but that couldn't help. The whole dynamic of the day of election was such, that right from the very beginning of Mass until the election, everything seemed to be telling me to accept the responsibility and say 'yes' to the calling if ever I am elected. It was a huge struggle to say 'yes'. I was running like Jonah because I felt like Jeremiah but by the grace of God, I was able to say like Isaiah: Here I am Lord. God's ways are known to Him alone as we all know it by our own experience. In spite of all my limitations, I believe it was God's calling. I haven't really started taking any language classes formally, but learning online via Duolingo. I have to learn Italian, Spanish and French. This perhaps will remain a big challenge for me. Hopefully, I will be able to pick up the language, or at least to manage to communicate well.

**DL- Bueno! Okay, during those weeks you were together, there was a shared feeling that became prominent: "Something must be done". I have felt that way for a long time about religious life, and especially our Congregation. Something is sucking the life out of it. Will there be any change for the better going ahead?**

SB- Actually, it was "Something has to change." Change is the law of nature. As we know that everything is changing and evolving, so also is religious life and its understanding. Yes, "Something has to change" was a very prominent slogan during the whole chapter. This realization seems to be the result of all the canonical visitations that the last General Government had made with the brothers around the world. So, this is the cry of the brothers worldwide in the congregation. All the participants at the Chapter echoed this motto and felt the need for change in all areas of our lives and at all levels very strongly. Two things came up very strongly during the Chapter discussion and discernment: Interdependence at all levels, and working together as one missionary body of Christ, with greater emphasis on the "option for the young people". The General Government is working on the chapter decision and how best could we implement this call of the chapter.

'Something has to change'. Though it is a cry of the brothers, there will be some reluctance in accepting the changes, as we know that change is not always easy. I hope and pray that we are open to changes for the better going ahead. Change has to begin with oneself at the personal level and then communal change occurs gradually.

**DL- The quote above speaks about “revolution”. The professed brother I quote gave us our SSCC retreat in Wareham a number of years ago. Anyhow, this Congregation was born in the middle of a Revolution. Difficult times have not stopped us, whether in France, or establishing ourselves in the Pacific. What has to change to keep the fire within us blazing?**

SB- Our Congregation is God’s work and I believe this very strongly. This phrase ‘We, the Congregation as God’s work’ came strongly during the chapter as well even though the number of members in the Congregation has been declining rapidly, due to various factors, such as very few numbers of vocations, brothers leaving the Congregation, and of course death. This reality should not discourage us but encourage us to live our lives faithfully, remaining zealous for the kingdom of God.

Any Congregation starts with one or a few more members and then gradually grows because of their faithfulness to Charism and mission entrusted to them. Our Congregation is no exception to it as the Congregation started very small, and then it grew up, and we are getting smaller again. We need to be enthused with the same zeal and passion of our Good Father and Good Mother (Founders), remaining faithful to our charism and mission, making it relevant to our time, and be filled with the love of God to live it, contemplate it, and to proclaim it to the world today, a world that is in dire need of God and God’s love. Our founders placed their total trust in God and remained faithful to the Eucharist and Eucharistic Adoration with the reparative aspect. I think and believe it is time for us to go back to the same trust, embracing the Eucharist and the ministry of Eucharistic Adoration that is given to us from where all the graces flow to keep the fire within us blazing.

**DL: You mentioned that we had an original growth, then we levelled off, and then we got smaller. I remember Fr. Fintan once talking about the life cycle of a religious community. Do you sense a spirit in the General Government that we will not become extinct like many others?**

SB- As I said earlier, our Congregation is God’s work, therefore, I believe that we will not become extinct. The General Government is also very positive and hopeful. We as the General Government would like to encourage all the brothers and sisters to remain faithful to the Charism and Mission entrusted to us and God will do the rest. We may not be a large Congregation but being smaller in number, we still can contribute something beautiful towards, building the Kingdom by living, contemplating and announcing God’s love to our world. We just need to do our part with hope and trust in God and His unconditional love. I think we must all say this like our Good Mother (Foundress): “We are in God’s hands: what God keeps, is well cared for, courage and patience, because everything is well taken care of, God is with us, we must not let ourselves be discouraged.”

**DL- The General Chapter made some decisions about accompanying young people. This is a challenge in the US. Very few young people continue on in parish life after their Confirmation. Is this a problem for other nations as well, places where we are? What are some “changes in ourselves” that we can make to befriend youth, as youth, and not (initially!) as vocation prospects?**

SB- Yes, the General Chapter made some decisions about accompanying Young People. As you say, this is a challenge in the US, and it is obvious that many young people do not continue on in parish life after Confirmation. This is a worldwide trend in young people. In some places, more young people are leaving the Church than in other places. That’s the reason the General Chapter came up with a decision to embrace this challenge. We know that in many places, we have been working with young people – some places have more active young people than some other places. This initiative – ‘Option for Young People’-- is something very new for us at the General level. The General Government has been praying, discerning and working on guidelines to implement this decision of the Chapter in the local communities, with flexibility to adapt the guidelines to our local needs. The most important change in ourselves should be the change of our attitude with optimism, to challenge oneself to go out to meet the young people where they are, invest time to listen to them attentively, be open to learn from them, and allow ourselves to be transformed by them, be open to invite them to the community and create a sacred, safe space for them. This is an initiative to simply listen to them, and befriend them and give them the sense that we are there for them. Vocation promotion is NOT the intention of this initiative at all, but if somebody feels inspired to join religious life, praise God.

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**DL- Have you read Pope Francis' Dilexit Nos, on the Sacred Heart of Jesus? If so, what were your thoughts?**

SB- Yes, I have read Pope Francis' encyclical Dilexit Nos, which translates to "He loved us". This phrase comes from 1 John 4:10 and is very profound, deeply rooted in the Scripture and Christian tradition, and emphasizes God's unconditional love for humanity. This document talks about God's love, His action and our human response. Reflecting on "Dilexit Nos," we realize that God's love is not just a concept but something that has been manifested in real and concrete ways. It became flesh in the person of Jesus, who showed God's love for humanity beyond measure, laying down His life for us on the Cross. In fact, the phrase "He loved us" speaks of the sacrificial nature of that love.

The document reminds us and emphasizes that God's love for humanity is not based on our worthiness but on His own divine nature. God loves us unconditionally, no matter what. God's love for humanity is the purest, most radical, unearned, unmerited, and yet so generous. Understanding that God loved us first calls for a response. The proper Christian response to God's love is not one of obligation but one of gratitude and love in return. Jesus calls us to love as He loved us (John 13:34). It is not merely an acknowledgment of God's love for us but also a challenging invitation to live in that love and allow it to transform us. When we grasp how deeply we are loved by God, our interaction with the world changes. We begin to translate the profound experience of God's love in our lives, into service to our neighbors, our enemies and the world at large. The love we receive becomes the love we give to our brothers and sisters around us.

We find it difficult to fully embrace God's unconditional love for us due to our own feelings of unworthiness, sinfulness, flaws and failings. But the document reminds us that God's love does not depend on our performance but purely on God's eternal, constant and steadfast love and unwavering character. The document reminds us that we are defined not by our sins and mistakes but by God's love for us. Dilexit Nos is not only a declaration of God's love but also a call to action. In the words of St. John, "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Let this truth guide our thoughts, actions, and relationships today and always.

**DL- Do you remember us working in the Enthronement committee with Frs. Columban, David Reid, Pat Fanning and Sr. Claire? Does the General Government see value in pursuing the work of Fr. Mateo?**

SB- Definitely, the General Government sees the value of pursuing the work of Fr. Mateo. In many places around the world, where we have been, the promotion of the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the Home is encouraged. Indeed, many of our brothers in other countries have taken this ministry seriously and continue to promote the work of Fr. Mateo. This is a very important ministry and most needed ministry in our world today more than ever to keep the family together and live the family values at home, acknowledging Jesus the Lord and King of our home and family.

**DL: That being the case, maybe accompanying families might have been more in line with our Charism than accompanying youth. All that aside, the Enthronement here in the US struggles to find a foundation, or at least here in the Northeast. Are we not taking it seriously enough? What are those brothers in other countries doing to find an advantage?**

SB- It is sad that the promotion and ministry of the Enthronement is somehow struggling to find a foundation among us. I wonder how many of our seminarians take an interest to learn about the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart, which was pioneered by our own priest, Fr. Mateo. How many of our priest brothers are passionate about it? Do they see the relevance of the Enthronement in our world today? Couldn't this be used as a tool for family ministry today? There seems to be a lack of interest and passion or perhaps a shift of focus into different ministries or to maintain the mission entrusted. There are other organizations including the lay organizations, who have picked up the ministry of Enthronement of the Sacred Heart and are doing much better than us. The Enthronement is still finding its relevance and advantage in some other countries perhaps because brothers are taking interest in the promotion of the Enthronement and also integrating this ministry into parish ministries. I believe the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart brings lots of blessings to the family members and is still so relevant to our world today. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus, reign over our hearts, family, society and the world.

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**DL- Well, alright! Are you reading anything worthwhile at the moment?**

SB- Well, at this time I am reading a book titled How to Lead & Still Have a Life – The 8 Principles of Less is More Leadership by H. Dale Burke. I have just started it and I find it to be very enlightening, inspiring, and enriching. Apart from this, I am also trying to learn language, mainly Spanish and Italian online. I hope to attend formal classes in the near future, at least to be able to communicate properly and appropriately in the language of people.

**DL: Thank you for taking the time!**

SB- I am so grateful to you for offering me this opportunity to have me share my views and thoughts. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus reign in our hearts and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us. Thank you and God bless you.

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**THE SILENT WORKER**

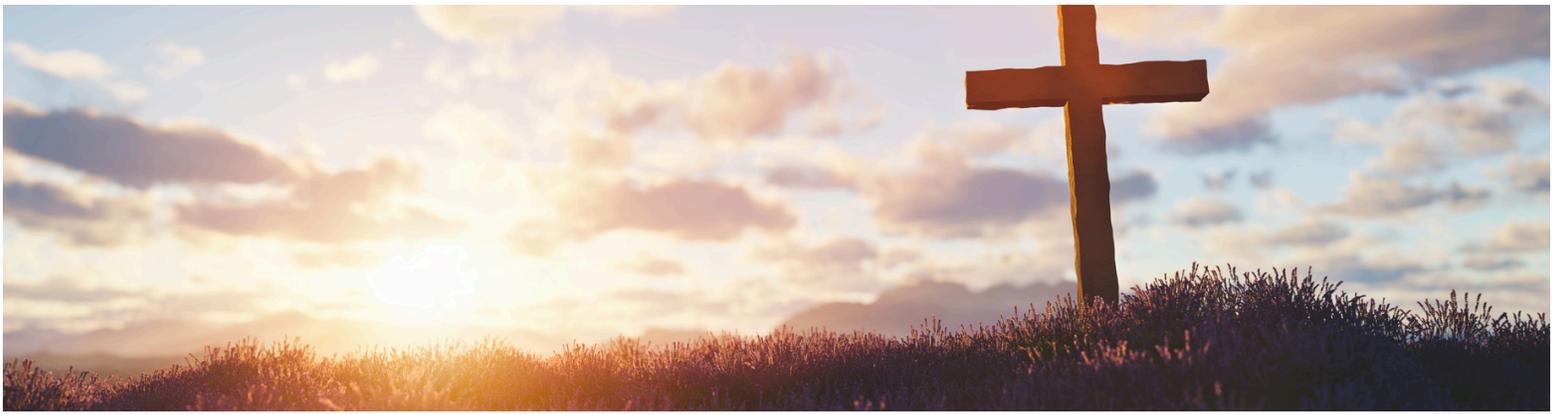
Yahweh created  
Parents distracted  
Chosen led  
Priests performed  
Judges judged  
Kings ruled  
Prophets prophesied  
People sinned  
John cried  
Lastly, Jesus fulfilled  
Boldly, Apostles proclaimed.

The Just, just worked with heart contemplative  
To shield Mary and Jesus' hearts redemptive.  
It's St. Joseph, the model of void silence  
Leads Mary Mother, the patron of obedience  
Guarding Christ Jesus, the light of radiance.

Having the law of heart  
Hidden wisdom does he impart  
Rising above his cultural identity  
Ignored the laws of vanity.

Unmentioned in the sacred scripture  
Upbringing the Saviour along architecture  
Right from the simple manger  
To set free people's danger.

All days, nights never unprepared  
To shepherd the prince Shepherd.  
Worshipping Him through silent work  
Even in days of dark.



## LOGICAL FAITH

There is a logic behind faith i.e. having faith in God. This article deals with the following questions and terms such as Why does God allow innocents to suffer or die? Why does not He punish terrorists or bad people? The primacy of social consciousness, The Importance of unknown things, God as Unknown (physically), and the logic behind faith in God. The article ends with critiquing Ivan Karamazov's poem, 'The Grand Inquisitor' in the novel, 'The Brothers Karamazov' and exposes the significance of Christ's silence in the poem.

### Freedom of Authentic Innocence

If God is all good and powerful then why does He allow innocents to suffer? This valid question has been asked by many intellectuals especially atheist friends. It may challenge one's faith in God who is considered to be all good and powerful Being. Some expect God as one who should protect innocents from sufferings and let the bad people to suffer. Thus, they logically expect God to control the acts of humans. If God secures innocents from sufferings, then the fact of being innocent will come under condition i.e. one wants to be good so that he or she will be secured from the possible sufferings of this world.

This smart way of being innocent is so small with its conditions of securing oneself and avoiding sufferings. It lacks true innocence that emerges without being conditioned i.e. one wants to be good regardless of one's would be joy, sufferings, and security etc. The true (free) way of being innocent cannot emerge when someone (like God) controls the acts of humans with possible appropriate effects. In other words, the authentic way of being good emerges when humans have free will that freely leads one to do certain good things without any external conditions from God.

### Social Consciousness

Authentic goodness can also refer to doing good deeds beyond external conditions from laws and regulations of one's nation. "For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." (Mt 5:20) Here Jesus hints at the importance of moving beyond national consciousness of laws to social consciousness of universal love. As one of the ancient Tamil poets from India, Kaniyan Pungundranar said two thousand years ago, "To us all towns are our own, everyone is our kin."

The kingdom of God which Christ mentions is based on social consciousness. When one is under social consciousness, he or she has to go through internal conditions more such as failures, fears, disappointments etc. These internal conditions can enhance or block authentic ways of being good. It all depends how one steps out of these necessary internal conditions rather than staying in. "Like Peter, we are called to be set free from a sense of failure before our occasionally disastrous fishing. To be set free from the fear that paralyzes us, makes us seek refuge in our own securities, and robs us of the courage of prophecy. Like Paul, we are called to be set free from hypocritical outward show, free from the temptation to present ourselves with worldly power rather than with the weakness that makes space for God, free from a religiosity that makes us rigid and inflexible; free from dubious associations with power and from the fear of being misunderstood and attacked." Pope Francis said in his homily on June 29, 2021.

### Beyond Reward Punishment Theory

An authentic way of being innocent is beyond reward-punishment theory by B. F Skinner. 'Beyond reward and punishment' refers to doing good just because one <sup>13</sup>

thinks that it is good rather than driven by some allotted rewards for a particular act. In the same way one avoids a bad act just because he or she thinks that it is not good rather than to escape from possible punishments. Authentic good deeds are driven from within and they absolutely require a free will that is devoid of outside conditioning factors. If there are external conditions (like rewards and punishments from God) then there cannot be free will. If there is no free will, one cannot act from within rather from outside after being controlled. If one cannot act from within, it cannot be an authentic act.

God wants humans to do good authentically. To do good authentically, the free will is necessary. Since the freewill makes authentic acts possible for humans, God will not interfere in humans' freewill. Since He does not interfere in the freewill of humans, He lets innocents to suffer or die in bomb blasts, illnesses, natural calamities, pandemic, accidents, wars etc., though He can protect (control) them instantly like a superman by providing security to innocents and punishing terrorists. If He acts like a superman, He will be controlling acts of humans. Consequently, the freewill and the authentic acts of humans will be no more. So, He lets humans to suffer that they will have an opportunity to live by the free will, and to grow in maturity by being really good. He just wants humans to live as free willed beings instead of being conditioned by the presupposed security, rewards, punishments, and having no freewill. He does not want to be a police man rather one who lets humans to be polished by the freewill.

Thus, there is a valid reason behind God's silence amidst innocents' sufferings. The valid reason is that all human beings be truly good based on the free will. Humans need to assimilate the reason, and do His will (that which is good and unconditional) by making use of the precious free will. He is not of a controlling God rather liberating (Easter) God who could save us mysteriously and grant peace (amidst sufferings) when we pray to that Being with constant faith. As one of the quotes is said, "God saves us in difficulties, not from difficulties."

'Power' for God is from oneself not from outside.  
'Love' for God is unconditional not conditional.  
'Act' for God is from within not from outside.

'Freedom' for God is being free rather than getting freed. For He is not of an alien being rather aligned Being in spirit. "They will all know me from the least to the greatest, says Yahweh" (Jer 31:34b). God is responsible for creating this mysterious universe but humans (in one or another way) are responsible for actions they do with the necessary gift of freewill. So, one cannot just blame God when something bad happens without a proper reason. The pain of a just will have its gain, and the pain of the unjust will be in vain. "There are no gains without pains", highlights Benjamin Franklin. For God, the purpose of pain is to gain something better rather than going towards vain. In a new message released on 27th January 2025, Pope Francis emphasized that suffering can become "an occasion for a transformative encounter" with God. It all depends on how one deals with challenges constructively with the Creator. He is not of a partial God who favours a particular group of righteous people alone rather ceaselessly favours everyone. "He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5:45).

### **'The Measure You Give the Measure You Receive.'**

Now what will happen to the innocents who suffer unjustly? Here comes the mystery of faith in God's eventual blessings that will grant a hope of experiencing peace of life during their lifetime yet to come or after their death. What will happen to the bad people? They will somehow undergo the same pain (they caused), during their lifetime yet to come or after their death. As Newton says, "Every action has its reaction." "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Mt 7:2). So, Innocents need to consistently remain good amidst temptations, sufferings & joy, and bad ones need to turn back (repent) doing good amidst difficulties and momentary happiness. "So, remember and feel ashamed, and in your confusion be reduced to silence when I forgive you for everything you have done"(Ezek16:63). "One needs to temper the temperature of temptations." It would be better if one uses the free will properly. No action is without its reaction. ....forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us..... (Our Father)

## **The Importance of Unknowns**

Life after death is something unknown but believed through one's faith. If everything is seen or known through reason then the life will be boring after experiencing momentary happiness. It is because one cannot have any opportunity or way to think further as there will be nothing else to be known. In this case faith is not possible. Life without a possibility of thinking further could lead to a miserable and boring life. God may not want humans to reach this boring stage of knowing everything. So, it is good that everything is not seen or known by reason. Thank God! There have to be some things and the physicality of God that necessarily not to be known. The reality of this unknown (things around the universe and God) give rise to thinking and reasoning further. It is this reality which makes one's life busy and interesting as there are things yet to be known. Reasoning with its deficit of not knowing somethings, brings forth the possibility of faith. So, the faith is born out of incomplete reasoning in knowing everything. "Faith is the reason for deficiency in reasoning." Thus, there is a logic behind the emergence of faith. This could be called as "Logical Faith." Faith could be the counsellor for restless reasoning. Overall, it makes sense why some things around the universe and the physical appearance of God are unknown.

## **The Significance of Faith**

Faith needs to face and move with challenges from growing reason without adamantly asserting itself superstitiously. As our holy father says, "There cannot and must not be any opposition between faith and science" (Comment in a video message to participants in the "Science for Peace" event, an international meeting held on July 2-3, 2021 in the Abruzzo region of southern Italy). This moving faith along with science, could grant hope, consolation, joy, and peace amidst the extending advancements of reason and its discoveries. If reasoning grows without the imagination of faith, then it may not have hopeful, joyful, and peaceful journey during the time of deep innovative thinking. "Imagination is more important than the knowledge." says Albert Einstein. Having realized the importance of imagination, Blaise Pascal says, "It is better to believe in God

than not to believe." So, it is good that all things around the universe are unknown, God is unknown (physically). "Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe" (John20: 29b). Unknowns have a purpose. It is they who make humans to think and believe. The coming generations need to have 'faith leading the growing reason' or 'reason extending with faith.' "Although you have not seen Him you love Him and even though you have not seen Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1Pet1:8-9). One needs to walk on the path of reason by carrying the lamp of faith.

## **The Significance of Easter Celebration**

Easter celebration in Christianity connotes the importance of going beyond or being freed from external conditions that humans could realize liberating God's will in themselves (God with us) and do it through the necessary gifts of free will, reason, and faith those are the aspects of being freely good (celebrating Easter), amidst required challenges. "Even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith- being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise, glory, and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1Pet 1: 6b-7).

## **Adventurous Journey**

The life will be quite interesting with its challenges and desperations as the reason with its advancements makes its adventurous journey into the space of faith as Mars' perseverance rover, and the helicopter made it on the surface of the Mars. "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." says Einstein. Humans need to thank and be grateful to God for granting this mysterious and amazing life, in which one has opportunities to think freely, doubt freely, believe freely, and at the end live freely in a true sense. "I thank You God for the wonder of my being" Psalm (139: 1b-3; 13-15).

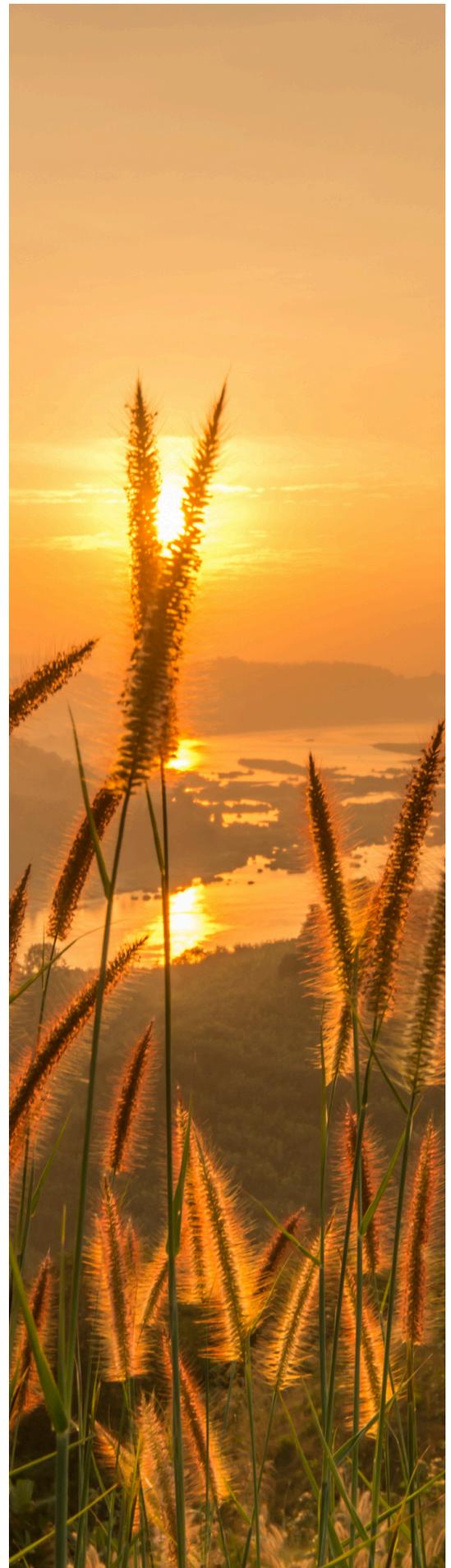
## **'Conditional love' of the Spanish Grand Inquisitor in the novel 'The Brothers Karamazov' by Fyodor Dostoevsky.**

In the novel "The Brothers Karamazov", the Spanish grand inquisitor quite logically questions Christ about the way He dealt with the three temptations. Firstly, he proposes that Christ could have turned stones into breads and fulfilled all people's hunger. Secondly, He could have proved His power by jumping from the cliff that people can see and assure about His supremacy. Thirdly, He could have occupied the whole world and given security to all that all will be protected.

The grand inquisitor's intention here is to do good to all people and promote 'his way of christianity' (kingdom of the world or empire) as it was hard for the majority of the people to follow the high moral standard set by Jesus. But his logically talented proposals to Christ are full of conditions where he expects God as a controller who would drive (force) humans according to His will rather than letting them to find His will in the free will. The inquisitor's idea of god is of conditional caregiver who controls humans, where else Christ's idea of God is of unconditional care giver who lets humans to live and act with the gift of free will that there would be an authentic gold of goodness which will shine after sustaining the intense heat of challenges appropriately. Having been asked by the inquisitor, Christ remained silent and kissed his cold bloodless lips (probably he might have talked so much).

The silence and kiss invite each one to logically revise and analyze the futility of the grand inquisitor's conditional love that smartly avoids the authentic goodness that is possible out of one's free will, reason, and faith. Christ responded to him with 'a holy kiss', hoping that he would eventually assimilate the unconditional love of God that which is possible out of one's freewill. However, the inquisitor avoids the true liberation (Easter) by leaving Christ (the liberator) in a prison. He has a good and conditioned logical point of view without the possibility of faith for a happy life devoid of promoting authentic acts where else Christ's silence(wisdom) and the kiss have a profound and unconditioned logical point of view with the possibility of faith for a meaningful life with authentic acts by fighting a good fight or running a good race. The suspense created by Christ's silence followed by the kiss of unconditional love, invites each one to discover hidden logic and sense behind the importance of free will, reason, faith, hope, and love in one's life.

Arockia Kulandai J, ssc.





## AT THE HEART OF THE HEART

There were many religious icons in my childhood home. Many of them depicted the blessed mother, particularly our Lady of Guadalupe. However, there was only one icon that was prominently displayed in the center of the house and that was the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I didn't give it much thought growing up that the location of the image was symbolic. I had been raised to believe that Jesus should be at the heart of who we are, what we say and how we act. My grandmother encouraged us to "look to the heart of Jesus" to help us be like him. The details as to how to actually do all of that, however, remained a mystery to me for a long time. The breakthrough for me came during my third year at St. John's Seminary. I was studying the gospel of John and discovered that John describes the heart of Jesus as a heart full of compassion, mercy, and love. That was the key that unlocked my devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. If Jesus is to be at the center of who we are, what we say and how we act then it means that we must be people of compassion, mercy and love. For me that means that God's will is compassion, mercy and love. Being people of compassion, mercy and love brings us into union with the heart of Jesus. It is no wonder that St. John the beloved rested his head on the heart of Jesus at the last supper perhaps wanting to draw from the wellspring of love personified.

As a fully professed brother and newly ordained deacon, I find myself "looking to the heart of Jesus" more and more as the source, purpose and meaning of ministry.

In other words, the Sacred Heart of Jesus compels me to connect to the humanity of others, to empathize with others, to journey in faith with others, to see beauty first in others and to share life, and all that that entails, with others in such a way that it will help lead them, and myself, to very heart of Christ. Simply put, the Sacred Heart of Jesus invites me to leave people "better than how I found them".

I must admit that this is not always easy to do. At times, my own weakness or selfishness stand as insurmountable barriers to the heart of Jesus. Many times I succumb to the whims of my surroundings, insecurities, pettiness, vanities and pride. I become comfortable relegating the Sacred Heart of Jesus to being just another religious image on the wall. For me, sometimes it is easier to see the Heart of Jesus rather than to have a Heart like Jesus. And so I go back to my modest home and the prominent placement of the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in it. The image was in the center; it was in the heart of our home as it were. It was placed there for a reason. I believe It was placed there to challenge us and to invite us. It challenged us to have a heart like His and invited us to be that heart in the world. Let us not only contemplate the Heart of Jesus but bring that heart to all we encounter by being compassionate, merciful and loving.

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