

Solemnity of the Sacred Heart 2018 (B)
(Hosea 11:1-4,8ac-9/John 19:31-37)
08.06.2018

Today's Solemnity would have us look to the One who was *pierced through for us*. It would have us turn our eyes, our hearts and our minds to the heart of Jesus opened out of love for **all** God's People. The emphasis on **all** God's People is important. Devotion to the Sacred Heart was born as a corrective at a time when the Jansenism had some people thinking in terms of God's love being only for some select, predestined *Chosen Few*, an elite of perfect people of impeccable moral standards.

This feast of the Sacred Heart would have us consider just how much God the Father loves us – with and in our weaknesses. It would have us rejoice in God's love for us revealed in a most extraordinary way in and through His Son, Christ Jesus. We are invited to contemplate Christ *lifted up from the earth*, for all to see, giving His life for sinners. Here God's gracious mercy and tender compassion is made visible. From Christ's open heart blood and water are seen to stream forth. This tide is symbolic of the gift of new life given to all those who humbly accept to be bathed in the current of love flowing from the cross of Jesus.

God is forever manifesting His love for us. He is forever renewing His life in us. If only we could see this! If we are truly attentive then we see traces of God's love and His life at every turn and in every circumstance of our lives. But, let's face it, how inattentive we can be and so often are. How forgetful and inconsiderate we are of the love shown to us. This is already true in our human relationships and it is true of our relationship with God.

Already the Old Testament prophet Hosea touched on the ill of our forgetfulness of God and the people's lack of consideration of His immense love. Hosea's whole mission was to remind the people of what they had forgotten. Our reading of his prophecy has for goal to help us remember what we can so easily forget: God's love which is ever ready to heal what is broken within us, to restore what is damaged, to rejuvenate what has grown old, to reinvigorate what has become tired, to renew what has become weary, to refresh what has become stale and lost its savour.

I believe that we would do well to read the prophet Hosea's words found in this morning's first reading in the optic of what St Ignatius of Loyola introduces as a spiritual exercise and calls *A Contemplation to Gain Love*. So, let's turn to the text of Hosea which speaks so eloquently of God's love for you and for me – doing so in the light of Ignatius' insights.

We have much to learn from the words Hosea was given by God to address to his listeners. Their message is as relevant for us today as when they were first pronounced for the benefit of God's Chosen People. In the short section from Hosea 11 we read this morning, the prophet compared God's love for Israel to a father's love for his small child. So, it is that God loves us. What is drawn to our attention here is God's love for us in our helplessness. What we have depicted for us by the prophet is a poignant picture of complete dependence on God. Such radical dependence upon God is something we can resent and rebel against. When we do that we are led to mess things up for ourselves. Just think of it... If we consider the really messy situations we can get into in our lives at times, is it not true that so often these are of our own making? Our wanting to do things our way – our insistence upon a *my way or no way* attitude and approach to life – is frequently precisely what leads to our downfall. It seems to me that what we are led to see here is that our *contemplation to gain love* has to be understood as a meditation that leads us to understand the importance of our dependence upon the love of the One whose Sacred Heart we are invited to look to in contemplative gaze.

Jesus addressed an important invitation to His disciples when He said to them: *Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart*. Perhaps the first thing we have to learn from Jesus is His total dependence upon the Father: *I do nothing of myself. I do only what the Father tells me to do*.

Christ's own humble dependence upon His Father – whom He trusted entirely and to whom He could confide Himself unconditionally – stemmed from the fact that He knew that the Father loved Him. Jesus had heard and taken to heart the words spoken both at His Baptism in the Jordan and on the Mount of the Transfiguration: *You are my beloved*. It was this that gave Him the confidence He needed to live in total dependence upon His Father. How important it is for us to hear those same words echoed and spoken over us if we are to live as we are called to do: totally dependent upon God's love for us.

I said that we would do well to read Hosea's prophecy in the light of what Ignatius calls the *Contemplation to Gain Love*. What Ignatius proposes in this contemplation is a consideration of how *love consists of deeds rather than just words* – and especially that *love is expressed in gift giving*. This is where Hosea's prophecy is so important. The prophet Hosea not only spoke in God's name, but he is shown to have acted as God would do. He displayed a love which was unconditional for his unfaithful wife: a love ever ready to forgive her infidelities; a love which gave a fresh start without hesitating and promptly offered new life in a restored relationship when the one who had gone astray came back. Is this not the kind of love fickle people like you and me stand in need of? In the spiritual exercise that Ignatius proposes to gain love – to come back to love and be restored in it – he proposes to the retreatant that he or she consider God's gifts one by one. I wonder if we ever do that enough. We can be so unaware of the multiple ways in which we are gifted by God and, in our unawareness, so ungrateful for these gifts. Ignatius then suggests that the retreatant seek to understand how God is actively at work in each gift bestowed and how the Lord's goodness is made manifest in all that is given.

The goal of this contemplation is to gain love is that the retreatant be led to reflect God's love that he or she has been led to consider; it is that the retreatant become as loving and as kind, as merciful and compassionate as Christ Jesus... as ready to show love to God and to others by their own self-offering. The retreatant's prayer should be as the traditional prayer to the Sacred Heart puts it: *Make my heart like unto Thine*. The goal of our contemplation of the love of God made manifest in and through the Sacred Heart of Jesus is that we come to have hearts like Gods own heart made manifest in and through Christ Jesus.

Reflecting upon Ignatius' proposed contemplation to gain love in retreat notes he made, a figure whom whom some people have only come to hear of recently because he was quoted by Bishop Micheal Curry in the sermon he preached recently for the Royal Wedding of Prince Harry to Meghan Markle, the French Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin scribbled these lines: *Your main purpose in this revealing to us of Your heart was to enable our love to escape from the constrictions of the too narrow, too precise, too limited image of You which we have fashioned for ourselves. What I discern in Your breast is simply a furnace of fire; and the more I fix my gaze upon its ardency the more it seems to me that all around it the contours of Your body melt away and become enlarged beyond all measure, till the only features I can distinguish in You are those of the face of a world which has burst into flame*. Clearly, Teilhard de Chardin's contemplation of the opened, pierced heart of Jesus led him to see the whole world – all things – in its light.

It is to be hoped that this is what our contemplation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus will lead us to experience. Like St Benedict at the end of his life may we be led to see *the whole world wrapped in a circle of light*: that light which emanates from the love of Jesus Christ.

Again Teilhard's insights are helpful. In retreat notes for his retreat of 1950 – from the part of his notes on the *Contemplation to Gain Love* he notes very practically: *What is important is not just to see the Lord revealed in all things, but to live that, to take His active presence seriously, to respond to it... It's not sufficient to understand the plans for the construction of an airplane; you have to build it and fly it!*

May our contemplation of the open, pierced heart of Jesus lead us to have hearts pierced open – just like Jesus' heart: hearts that exude God's love and reveal it to others by deeds inspired by God's

own goodness. May we be led by our celebration of today's feast to be as Jesus was and to do as Jesus did. May we be led to reflect God's goodness. As the great Christian witness put it in the testimony he rendered to Jesus in the Acts of the Apostles, may we *go about everywhere doing the good*.

Amen!