

O'SHEA SHIELD 2026



Religious Questions
Ngā patai whakapono
DOCUMENT

ENCYCLICAL LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS

DILEXIT NOS

ON THE HUMAN AND DIVINE LOVE OF THE HEART OF JESUS CHRIST

1. “HE LOVED US”, Saint Paul says of Christ (cf. Rom 8:37), in order to make us realize that nothing can ever “separate us” from that love (Rom 8:39). Paul could say this with certainty because Jesus himself had told his disciples, “I have loved you” (Jn 15:9, 12). Even now, the Lord says to us, “I have called you friends” (Jn 15:15). His open heart has gone before us and waits for us, unconditionally, asking only to offer us his love and friendship. For “he loved us first” (cf. 1 Jn 4:10). Because of Jesus, “we have come to know and believe in the love that God has for us” (1 Jn 4:16).

CHAPTER ONE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HEART

2. The symbol of the heart has often been used to express the love of Jesus Christ. Some have questioned whether this symbol is still meaningful today. Yet living as we do in an age of superficiality, rushing frenetically from one thing to another without really knowing why, and ending up as insatiable consumers and slaves to the mechanisms of a market unconcerned about the deeper meaning of our lives, all of us need to rediscover the importance of the heart. [1]

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “THE HEART”?

3. In classical Greek, the word *kardía* denotes the inmost part of human beings, animals and plants. For Homer, it indicates not only the centre of the body, but also the human soul and spirit. In the *Iliad*, thoughts and feelings proceed from the heart and are closely bound one to another. [2] The heart appears as the locus of desire and the place where important decisions take shape. [3] In Plato, the heart serves, as it were, to unite the rational and instinctive aspects of the person, since the impulses of both the higher faculties and the passions were thought to pass through the veins that converge in the heart. [4] From ancient times, then, there has been an appreciation of the fact that human beings are not simply a sum of different skills, but a unity of body and soul with a coordinating centre that provides a backdrop of meaning and direction to all that a person experiences.

4. The Bible tells us that, “the Word of God is living and active... it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). In this way, it speaks to us of the heart as a core that lies hidden beneath all outward appearances, even beneath the superficial thoughts that can lead us astray. The disciples of Emmaus, on their mysterious journey in the company of the risen Christ, experienced a moment of anguish, confusion, despair and disappointment. Yet, beyond and in spite of this, something was happening deep within them: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?” (Lk 24:32).

5. The heart is also the locus of sincerity, where deceit and disguise have no place. It usually indicates our true intentions, what we really think, believe and desire, the “secrets” that we tell no one: in a word, the naked truth about ourselves. It is the part of us that is neither appearance or illusion, but is instead authentic, real, entirely “who we are”. That is why Samson, who kept from Delilah the secret of his strength, was asked by her, “How can you say, ‘I love you’, when your heart is not with me?” (Judg 16:15). Only when Samson opened his heart to her, did she realize “that he had told her his whole secret” (Judg 16:18).

6. This interior reality of each person is frequently concealed behind a great deal of “foliage”, which makes it difficult for us not only to understand ourselves, but even more to know others: “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse, who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9). We can understand, then, the advice of the Book of Proverbs: “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life; put away from you crooked speech” (4:23-24). Mere appearances, dishonesty and deception harm and pervert the heart. Despite our every attempt to appear as something we are not, our heart is the ultimate judge, not of what we show or hide from others, but of who we truly are. It is the basis for any sound life project; nothing worthwhile can be undertaken apart from the heart. False appearances and untruths ultimately leave us empty-handed.

7. As an illustration of this, I would repeat a story I have already told on another occasion. “For the carnival, when we were children, my grandmother would make a pastry using a very thin batter. When she dropped the strips of batter into the oil, they would expand, but then, when we bit into them, they were empty inside. In the dialect we spoke, those cookies were called ‘lies’... My grandmother explained why: ‘Like lies, they look big, but are empty inside; they are false, unreal’”. [5]

8. Instead of running after superficial satisfactions and playing a role for the benefit of others, we would do better to think about the really important questions in life. Who am I, really? What am I looking for? What direction do I want to give to my life, my decisions and my actions? Why and for what purpose am I in this world? How do I want to look back on

my life once it ends? What meaning do I want to give to all my experiences? Who do I want to be for others? Who am I for God? All these questions lead us back to the heart.

RETURNING TO THE HEART

9. In this “liquid” world of ours, we need to start speaking once more about the heart and thinking about this place where every person, of every class and condition, creates a synthesis, where they encounter the radical source of their strengths, convictions, passions and decisions. Yet, we find ourselves immersed in societies of serial consumers who live from day to day, dominated by the hectic pace and bombarded by technology, lacking in the patience needed to engage in the processes that an interior life by its very nature requires. In contemporary society, people “risk losing their centre, the centre of their very selves”. [6] “Indeed, the men and women of our time often find themselves confused and torn apart, almost bereft of an inner principle that can create unity and harmony in their lives and actions. Models of behaviour that, sadly, are now widespread exaggerate our rational-technological dimension or, on the contrary, that of our instincts”. [7] No room is left for the heart.

10. The issues raised by today’s liquid society are much discussed, but this depreciation of the deep core of our humanity – the heart – has a much longer history. We find it already present in Hellenic and pre-Christian rationalism, in post-Christian idealism and in materialism in its various guises. The heart has been ignored in anthropology, and the great philosophical tradition finds it a foreign notion, preferring other concepts such as reason, will or freedom. The very meaning of the term is imprecise and hard to situate within our human experience. Perhaps this is due to the difficulty of treating it as a “clear and distinct idea”, or because it entails the question of self-understanding, where the deepest part of us is also that which is least known. Even encountering others does not necessarily prove to be a way of encountering ourselves, inasmuch as our thought patterns are dominated by an unhealthy individualism. Many people feel safer constructing their systems of thought in the more readily controllable domain of intelligence and will. The failure to make room for the heart, as distinct from our human powers and passions viewed in isolation from one another, has resulted in a stunting of the idea of a personal centre, in which love, in the end, is the one reality that can unify all the others.

11. If we devalue the heart, we also devalue what it means to speak from the heart, to act with the heart, to cultivate and heal the heart. If we fail to appreciate the specificity of the heart, we miss the messages that the mind alone cannot communicate; we miss out on the richness of our encounters with others; we miss out on poetry. We also lose track of history and our own past, since our real personal history is built with the heart. At the end of our lives, that alone will matter.

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13. All our actions need to be put under the “political rule” of the heart. In this way, our aggressiveness and obsessive desires will find rest in the greater good that the heart proposes and in the power of the heart to resist evil. The mind and the will are put at the service of the greater good by sensing and savouring truths, rather than seeking to master them as the sciences tend to do. The will desires the greater good that the heart recognizes, while the imagination and emotions are themselves guided by the beating of the heart.

14. It could be said, then, that I am my heart, for my heart is what sets me apart, shapes my spiritual identity and puts me in communion with other people. The algorithms operating in the digital world show that our thoughts and will are much more “uniform” than we had previously thought. They are easily predictable and thus capable of being manipulated. That is not the case with the heart.

15. The word “heart” proves its value for philosophy and theology in their efforts to reach an integral synthesis. Nor can its meaning be exhausted by biology, psychology, anthropology or any other science. It is one of those primordial words that “describe realities belonging to man precisely in so far as he is one whole (as a corporeo-spiritual person)”. [10] It follows that biologists are not being more “realistic” when they discuss the heart, since they see only one aspect of it; the whole is not less real, but even more real. Nor can abstract language ever acquire the same concrete and integrative meaning. The word “heart” evokes the inmost core of our person, and thus it enables us to understand ourselves in our integrity and not merely under one isolated aspect.

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THE HEART UNITES THE FRAGMENTS

17. At the same time, the heart makes all authentic bonding possible, since a relationship not shaped by the heart is incapable of overcoming the fragmentation caused by individualism. Two monads may approach one another, but they will never truly connect. A society dominated by narcissism and self-centredness will increasingly become “heartless”. This will lead in turn to the “loss of desire”, since as other persons disappear from the horizon we find ourselves trapped within walls of our own making, no longer capable of healthy relationships. [14] As a result, we also become incapable of openness to God. As Heidegger puts it, to be open to the divine we need to build a “guest house”. [15]

18. We see, then, that in the heart of each person there is a mysterious connection between self-knowledge and openness to others, between the encounter with one's personal uniqueness and the willingness to give oneself to others. We become ourselves only to the extent that we acquire the ability to acknowledge others, while only those who can acknowledge and accept themselves are then able to encounter others.

19. The heart is also capable of unifying and harmonizing our personal history, which may seem hopelessly fragmented, yet is the place where everything can make sense. The Gospel tells us this in speaking of Our Lady, who saw things with the heart. She was able to dialogue with the things she experienced by pondering them in her heart, treasuring their memory and viewing them in a greater perspective. The best expression of how the heart thinks is found in the two passages in Saint Luke's Gospel that speak to us of how Mary "treasured (synetérei) all these things and pondered (symbállousa) them in her heart" (cf. Lk 2:19 and 51). The Greek verb symbálllein, "ponder", evokes the image of putting two things together ("symbols") in one's mind and reflecting on them, in a dialogue with oneself. In Luke 2:51, the verb used is dietérei, which has the sense of "keep". What Mary "kept" was not only her memory of what she had seen and heard, but also those aspects of it that she did not yet understand; these nonetheless remained present and alive in her memory, waiting to be "put together" in her heart.

20. In this age of artificial intelligence, we cannot forget that poetry and love are necessary to save our humanity. No algorithm will ever be able to capture, for example, the nostalgia that all of us feel, whatever our age, and wherever we live, when we recall how we first used a fork to seal the edges of the pies that we helped our mothers or grandmothers to make at home. It was a moment of culinary apprenticeship, somewhere between child-play and adulthood, when we first felt responsible for working and helping one another. Along with the fork, I could also mention thousands of other little things that are a precious part of everyone's life: a smile we elicited by telling a joke, a picture we sketched in the light of a window, the first game of soccer we played with a rag ball, the worms we collected in a shoebox, a flower we pressed in the pages of a book, our concern for a fledgling bird fallen from its nest, a wish we made in plucking a daisy. All these little things, ordinary in themselves yet extraordinary for us, can never be captured by algorithms. The fork, the joke, the window, the ball, the shoebox, the book, the bird, the flower: all of these live on as precious memories "kept" deep in our heart.

21. This profound core, present in every man and woman, is not that of the soul, but of the entire person in his or her unique psychosomatic identity. Everything finds its unity in the heart, which can be the dwelling-place of love in all its spiritual, psychic and even physical dimensions. In a word, if love reigns in our heart, we become, in a complete and luminous way, the persons we are meant to be, for every human being is created above all else for love. In the deepest fibre of our being, we were made to love and to be loved.

22. For this reason, when we witness the outbreak of new wars, with the complicity, tolerance or indifference of other countries, or petty power struggles over partisan interests, we may be tempted to conclude that our world is losing its heart. We need only to see and listen to the elderly women – from both sides – who are at the mercy of these devastating conflicts. It is heart-breaking to see them mourning for their murdered grandchildren, or longing to die themselves after losing the homes where they spent their entire lives. Those women, who were often pillars of strength and resilience amid life’s difficulties and hardships, now, at the end of their days, are experiencing, in place of a well-earned rest, only anguish, fear and outrage. Casting the blame on others does not resolve these shameful and tragic situations. To see these elderly women weep, and not feel that this is something intolerable, is a sign of a world that has grown heartless.

23. Whenever a person thinks, questions and reflects on his or her true identity, strives to understand the deeper questions of life and to seek God, or experiences the thrill of catching a glimpse of truth, it leads to the realization that our fulfillment as human beings is found in love. In loving, we sense that we come to know the purpose and goal of our existence in this world. Everything comes together in a state of coherence and harmony. It follows that, in contemplating the meaning of our lives, perhaps the most decisive question we can ask is, “Do I have a heart?”

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CHAPTER TWO ACTIONS AND WORDS OF LOVE

32. The heart of Christ, as the symbol of the deepest and most personal source of his love for us, is the very core of the initial preaching of the Gospel. It stands at the origin of our faith, as the wellspring that refreshes and enlivens our Christian beliefs.

ACTIONS THAT REFLECT THE HEART

33. Christ showed the depth of his love for us not by lengthy explanations but by concrete actions. By examining his interactions with others, we can come to realize how he treats each one of us, even though at times this may be difficult to see. Let us now turn to the place where our faith can encounter this truth: the word of God.

34. The Gospel tells us that Jesus “came to his own” (cf. Jn 1:11). Those words refer to us, for the Lord does not treat us as strangers but as a possession that he watches over and cherishes. He treats us truly as “his own”. This does not mean that we are his slaves, something that he himself denies: “I do not call you servants” (Jn 15:15). Rather, it refers to the sense of mutual belonging typical of friends. Jesus came to meet us, bridging all distances; he became as close to us as the simplest, everyday realities of our lives. Indeed, he has another name, “Emmanuel”, which means “God with us”, God as part of our lives, God as living in our midst. The Son of God became incarnate and “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Phil 2:7).

35. This becomes clear when we see Jesus at work. He seeks people out, approaches them, ever open to an encounter with them. We see it when he stops to converse with the Samaritan woman at the well where she went to draw water (cf. Jn 4:5-7). We see it when, in the darkness of night, he meets Nicodemus, who feared to be seen in his presence (cf. Jn 3:1-2). We marvel when he allows his feet to be washed by a prostitute (cf. Lk 7:36-50), when he says to the woman caught in adultery, “Neither do I condemn you” (Jn 8:11), or again when he chides the disciples for their indifference and quietly asks the blind man on the roadside, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mk 10:51). Christ shows that God is closeness, compassion and tender love.

36. Whenever Jesus healed someone, he preferred to do it, not from a distance but in close proximity: “He stretched out his hand and touched him” (Mt 8:3). “He touched her hand” (Mt 8:15). “He touched their eyes” (Mt 9:29). Once he even stopped to cure a deaf man with his own saliva (cf. Mk 7:33), as a mother would do, so that people would not think of him as removed from their lives. “The Lord knows the fine science of the caress. In his compassion, God does not love us with words; he comes forth to meet us and, by his closeness, he shows us the depth of his tender love”. [27]

37. If we find it hard to trust others because we have been hurt by lies, injuries and disappointments, the Lord whispers in our ear: “Take heart, son!” (Mt 9:2), “Take heart, daughter!” (Mt 9:22). He encourages us to overcome our fear and to realise that, with him at our side, we have nothing to lose. To Peter, in his fright, “Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him”, saying, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Mt 14:31). Nor should you be afraid. Let him draw near and sit at your side. There may be many people we distrust, but not him. Do not hesitate because of your sins. Keep in mind that many sinners “came and sat with him” (Mt 9:10), yet Jesus was scandalized by none of them. It was the religious élite that complained and treated him as “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Mt 11:19). When the Pharisees criticised him for his closeness to people deemed base or sinful, Jesus replied, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Mt 9:13).

38. That same Jesus is now waiting for you to give him the chance to bring light to your life, to raise you up and to fill you with his strength. Before his death, he assured his disciples, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me” (Jn 14:18-19). Jesus always finds a way to be present in your life, so that you can encounter him.

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CHAPTER FIVE LOVE FOR LOVE

EXTENDING CHRIST’S LOVE TO OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS

167. We need once more to take up the word of God and to realise, in doing so, that our best response to the love of Christ’s heart is to love our brothers and sisters. There is no greater way for us to return love for love. The Scriptures make this patently clear: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). “For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’” (Gal 5:14).

“We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death” (1 Jn 3:14).

“Those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen” (1 Jn 4:20).

168. Love for our brothers and sisters is not simply the fruit of our own efforts; it demands the transformation of our selfish hearts. This realisation gave rise to the oft-repeated prayer: “Jesus, make our hearts more like your own”. Saint Paul, for his part, urged his hearers to pray not for the strength to do good works, but “to have the same mind among you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5).

169. We need to remember that in the Roman Empire many of the poor, foreigners and others who lived on the fringes of society met with respect, affection and care from Christians. This explains why the apostate emperor Julian, in one of his letters, acknowledged that one reason why Christians were respected and imitated was the assistance they gave the poor and strangers, who were ordinarily ignored and treated with contempt. For Julian, it was intolerable that the Christians whom he despised, “in addition to feeding their own, also feed our poor and needy, who receive no help from us”. [166] The emperor thus insisted on the need to create charitable institutions to compete with those of the Christians and thus gain the respect of society: “There should be instituted in each city many accommodations so that the immigrants may enjoy our philanthropy... and make the Greeks accustomed to such works of generosity”. [167] Julian did not achieve

his objective, no doubt because underlying those works there was nothing comparable to the Christian charity that respected the unique dignity of each person.

170. By associating with the lowest ranks of society (cf. Mt 25:31-46), “Jesus brought the great novelty of recognising the dignity of every person, especially those who were considered ‘unworthy’. This new principle in human history – which emphasises that individuals are even more ‘worthy’ of our respect and love when they are weak, scorned, or suffering, even to the point of losing the human ‘figure’ – has changed the face of the world. It has given life to institutions that take care of those who find themselves in disadvantaged conditions, such as abandoned infants, orphans, the elderly who are left without assistance, the mentally ill, people with incurable diseases or severe deformities, and those living on the streets”. [168]

171. In contemplating the pierced heart of the Lord, who “took our infirmities and bore our diseases” (Mt 8:17), we too are inspired to be more attentive to the sufferings and needs of others, and confirmed in our efforts to share in his work of liberation as instruments for the spread of his love. [169] As we meditate on Christ’s self-offering for the sake of all, we are naturally led to ask why we too should not be ready to give our lives for others: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and that we ought to lay down our lives for one another” (1 Jn 3:16).

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REPARATION: BUILDING ON THE RUINS

181. All that has been said thus far enables us to understand in the light of God’s word the proper meaning of the “reparation” to the heart of Christ that the Lord expects us, with the help of his grace, to “offer”. The question has been much discussed, but Saint John Paul II has given us a clear response that can guide Christians today towards a spirit of reparation more closely attuned to the Gospels.

The social significance of reparation to the heart of Christ

182. Saint John Paul explained that by entrusting ourselves together to the heart of Christ, “over the ruins accumulated by hatred and violence, the greatly desired civilisation of love, the Kingdom of the heart of Christ, can be built”. This clearly requires that we “unite filial love for God and love of neighbour”, and indeed this is “the true reparation asked by the heart of the Saviour”. [192] In union with Christ, amid the ruins we have left in this world by our sins, we are called to build a new civilisation of love. That is what it means to make reparation as the heart of Christ would have us do. Amid the devastation wrought by evil, the heart of Christ desires that we cooperate with him in restoring goodness and beauty to our world.

183. All sin harms the Church and society; as a result, “every sin can undoubtedly be considered as a social sin” and this is especially true for those sins that “by their very matter constitute a direct attack on one’s neighbour”. [193] Saint John Paul II explained that the repetition of these sins against others often consolidates a “structure of sin” that has an effect on the development of peoples. [194] Frequently, this is part of a dominant mind-set that considers normal or reasonable what is merely selfishness and indifference. This then gives rise to social alienation: “A society is alienated if its forms of social organization, production and consumption make it more difficult to offer the gift of self and to establish solidarity between people”. [195] It is not only a moral norm that leads us to expose and resist these alienated social structures and to support efforts within society to restore and consolidate the common good. Rather, it is our “conversion of heart” that “imposes the obligation” [196] to repair these structures. It is our response to the love of the heart of Jesus, which teaches us to love in turn.

184. Precisely because evangelical reparation possesses this vital social dimension, our acts of love, service and reconciliation, in order to be truly reparative, need to be inspired, motivated and empowered by Christ. Saint John Paul II also observed that “to build the civilisation of love”, [197] our world today needs the heart of Christ. Christian reparation cannot be understood simply as a congeries of external works, however indispensable and at times admirable they may be. These need a “mystique”, a soul, a meaning that grants them strength, drive and tireless creativity. They need the life, the fire and the light that radiate from the heart of Christ.

Mending wounded hearts

185. Nor is a merely outward reparation sufficient, either for our world or for the heart of Christ. If each of us considers his or her own sins and their effect on others, we will realise that repairing the harm done to this world also calls for a desire to mend wounded hearts where the deepest harm was done, and the hurt is most painful.

186. A spirit of reparation thus “leads us to hope that every wound can be healed, however deep it may be. Complete reparation may at times seem impossible, such as when goods or loved ones are definitively lost, or when certain situations have become irremediable. Yet the intention to make amends, and to do so in a concrete way, is essential for the process of reconciliation and a return to peace of heart”. [198]

The beauty of asking forgiveness

187. Good intentions are not enough. There has to be an inward desire that finds expression in our outward actions. “Reparation, if it is to be Christian, to touch the offended person’s heart and not be a simple act of commutative justice, presupposes two demanding things: acknowledging our guilt and asking forgiveness... It is from the honest acknowledgment of the wrong done to our brother or sister, and from the profound and

sincere realisation that love has been compromised, that the desire to make amends arises". [199]

188. We should never think that acknowledging our sins before others is somehow demeaning or offensive to our human dignity. On the contrary, it demands that we stop deceiving ourselves and acknowledge our past for what it is, marred by sin, especially in those cases when we caused hurt to our brothers and sisters. "Self-accusation is part of Christian wisdom... It is pleasing to the Lord, because the Lord accepts a contrite heart". [200]

189. Part of this spirit of reparation is the custom of asking forgiveness from our brothers and sisters, which demonstrates great nobility amid our human weakness. Asking forgiveness is a means of healing relationships, for it "re-opens dialogue and manifests the will to re-establish the bond of fraternal charity... It touches the heart of our brother or sister, brings consolation and inspires acceptance of the forgiveness requested. Even if the irreparable cannot be completely repaired, love can always be reborn, making the hurt bearable". [201]

190. A heart capable of compunction will grow in fraternity and solidarity. Otherwise, "we regress and grow old within", whereas when "our prayer becomes simpler and deeper, grounded in adoration and wonder in the presence of God, we grow and mature. We become less attached to ourselves and more attached to Christ. Made poor in spirit, we draw closer to the poor, those who are dearest to God". [202] This leads to a true spirit of reparation, for "those who feel compunction of heart increasingly feel themselves brothers and sisters to all the sinners of the world; renouncing their airs of superiority and harsh judgments, they are filled with a burning desire to show love and make reparation". [203] The sense of solidarity born of compunction also enables reconciliation to take place. The person who is capable of compunction, "rather than feeling anger and scandal at the failings of our brothers and sisters, weeps for their sins. There occurs a sort of reversal, where the natural tendency to be indulgent with ourselves and inflexible with others is overturned and, by God's grace, we become strict with ourselves and merciful towards others". [204]

REPARATION: AN EXTENSION OF THE HEART OF CHRIST

191. There is another, complementary, approach to reparation, which allows us to set it in an even more direct relationship with the heart of Christ, without excluding the aspect of concrete commitment to our brothers and sisters.

192. Elsewhere I have suggested that, “God has in some way sought to limit himself in such a way that many of the things we think of as evils, dangers or sources of suffering, are in reality part of the pains of childbirth which he uses to draw us into the act of cooperation with the Creator”. [205] This cooperation on our part can allow the power and the love of God to expand in our lives and in the world, whereas our refusal or indifference can prevent it. Several passages of the Bible express this metaphorically, as when the Lord cries out, “If only you would return to me, O Israel!” (cf. Jer 4:1). Or when, confronted with rejection by his people, he says, “My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender” (Hos 11:8).

193. Even though it is not possible to speak of new suffering on the part of the glorified Lord, “the paschal mystery of Christ... and all that Christ is – all that he did and suffered for all men – participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times while being made present in them all”. [206] We can say that he has allowed the expansive glory of his resurrection to be limited and the diffusion of his immense and burning love to be contained, in order to leave room for our free cooperation with his heart. Our rejection of his love erects a barrier to that gracious gift, whereas our trusting acceptance of it opens a space, a channel enabling it to pour into our hearts. Our rejection or indifference limits the effects of his power and the fruitfulness of his love in us. If he does not encounter openness and confidence in me, his love is deprived – because he himself has willed it – of its extension, unique and unrepeatable, in my life and in this world, where he calls me to make him present. Again, this does not stem from any weakness on his part but rather from his infinite freedom, his mysterious power and his perfect love for each of us. When God’s power is revealed in the weakness of our human freedom, “only faith can discern it”. [207]

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Integrity and Harmony

200. Sisters and brothers, I propose that we develop this means of reparation, which is, in a word, to offer the heart of Christ a new possibility of spreading in this world the flames of his ardent and gracious love. While it remains true that reparation entails the desire to “render compensation for the injuries inflicted on uncreated Love, whether by negligence or grave offense”, [217] the most fitting way to do this is for our love to offer the Lord a possibility of spreading, in amends for all those occasions when his love has been rejected or refused. This involves more than simply the “consolation” of Christ of which we spoke in the previous chapter; it finds expression in acts of fraternal love by which we heal the wounds of the Church and of the world. In this way, we offer the healing power of the heart of Christ new ways of expressing itself.

201. The sacrifices and sufferings required by these acts of love of neighbour unite us to the passion of Christ. In this way, “by that mystic crucifixion of which the Apostle speaks, we shall receive the abundant fruits of its propitiation and expiation, for ourselves and for others”. [218] Christ alone saves us by his offering on the cross; he alone redeems us, for “there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:5-6). The reparation that we offer is a freely accepted participation in his redeeming love and his one sacrifice. We thus complete in our flesh “what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church” (Col 1:24); and Christ himself prolongs through us the effects of his complete and loving self-oblation.

202. Often, our sufferings have to do with our own wounded ego. The humility of the heart of Christ points us towards the path of abasement. God chose to come to us in condescension and littleness. The Old Testament had already shown us, with a variety of metaphors, a God who enters into the heart of history and allows himself to be rejected by his people. Christ’s love was shown amid the daily life of his people, begging, as it were, for a response, as if asking permission to manifest his glory. Yet “perhaps only once did the Lord Jesus refer to his own heart, in his own words. And he stresses this sole feature: ‘gentleness and lowliness’, as if to say that only in this way does he wish to win us to himself”. [219] When he said, “Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Mt 11:29), he showed us that “to make himself known, he needs our littleness, our self-abasement”. [220]

203. In what we have said, it is important to note several inseparable aspects. Acts of love of neighbour, with the renunciation, self-denial, suffering and effort that they entail, can only be such when they are nourished by Christ’s own love. He enables us to love as he loved, and in this way he loves and serves others through us. He humbles himself to show his love through our actions, yet even in our slightest works of mercy, his heart is glorified and displays all its grandeur. Once our hearts welcome the love of Christ in complete trust, and enable its fire to spread in our lives, we become capable of loving others as Christ did, in humility and closeness to all. In this way, Christ satisfies his thirst and gloriously spreads the flames of his ardent and gracious love in us and through us. How can we fail to see the magnificent harmony present in all this?

204. Finally, in order to appreciate this devotion in all of its richness, it is necessary to add, in the light of what we have said about its Trinitarian dimension, that the reparation made by Christ in his humanity is offered to the Father through the working of the Holy Spirit in each of us. Consequently, the reparation we offer to the heart of Christ is directed ultimately to the Father, who is pleased to see us united to Christ whenever we offer ourselves through him, with him and in him.

BRINGING LOVE TO THE WORLD

205. The Christian message is attractive when experienced and expressed in its totality: not simply as a refuge for pious thoughts or an occasion for impressive ceremonies. What kind of worship would we give to Christ if we were to rest content with an individual relationship with him and show no interest in relieving the sufferings of others or helping them to live a better life? Would it please the heart that so loved us, if we were to bask in a private religious experience while ignoring its implications for the society in which we live? Let us be honest and accept the word of God in its fullness. On the other hand, our work as Christians for the betterment of society should not obscure its religious inspiration, for that, in the end, would be to seek less for our brothers and sisters than what God desires to give them. For this reason, we should conclude this chapter by recalling the missionary dimension of our love for the heart of Christ.

206. Saint John Paul II spoke of the social dimension of devotion to the heart of Christ, but also about “reparation, which is apostolic cooperation in the salvation of the world”. [221] Consecration to the heart of Christ is thus “to be seen in relation to the Church’s missionary activity, since it responds to the desire of Jesus’ heart to spread throughout the world, through the members of his Body, his complete commitment to the Kingdom”. [222] As a result, “through the witness of Christians, love will be poured into human hearts, to build up the body of Christ which is the Church, and to build a society of justice, peace and fraternity”. [223]

207. The flames of love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus also expand through the Church’s missionary outreach, which proclaims the message of God’s love revealed in Christ. Saint Vincent de Paul put this nicely when he invited his disciples to pray to the Lord for “this spirit, this heart that causes us to go everywhere, this heart of the Son of God, the heart of our Lord, that disposes us to go as he went... he sends us, like [the apostles], to bring fire everywhere”. [224]

208. Saint Paul VI, addressing religious Congregations dedicated to the spread of devotion to the Sacred Heart, made the following observation. “There can be no doubt that pastoral commitment and missionary zeal will fan into flame, if priests and laity alike, in their desire to spread the glory of God, contemplate the example of eternal love that Christ has shown us, and direct their efforts to make all men and women sharers in the unfathomable riches of Christ”. [225] As we contemplate the Sacred Heart, mission becomes a matter of love. For the greatest danger in mission is that, amid all the things we say and do, we fail to bring about a joyful encounter with the love of Christ who embraces us and saves us.

209. Mission, as a radiation of the love of the heart of Christ, requires missionaries who are themselves in love and who, enthralled by Christ, feel bound to share this love that has changed their lives. They are impatient when time is wasted discussing secondary questions or concentrating on truths and rules, because their greatest concern is to share what they have experienced. They want others to perceive the goodness and beauty of the Beloved through their efforts, however inadequate they may be. Is that not the case with any lover? We can take as an example the words with which Dante Alighieri sought to express this logic of love:

*“Io dico che, pensando al suo valore amor si dolce si mi si fa sentire,
che s’io allora non perdessi ardire
farei parlando innamorar la gente”.* [226]

210. To be able to speak of Christ, by witness or by word, in such a way that others seek to love him, is the greatest desire of every missionary of souls. This dynamism of love has nothing to do with proselytism; the words of a lover do not disturb others, they do not make demands or oblige, they only lead others to marvel at such love. With immense respect for their freedom and dignity, the lover simply waits for them to inquire about the love that has filled his or her life with such great joy.

211. Christ asks you never to be ashamed to tell others, with all due discretion and respect, about your friendship with him. He asks that you dare to tell others how good and beautiful it is that you found him. “Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven” (Mt 10:32). For a heart that loves, this is not a duty but an irrepressible need: “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16). “Within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (Jer 20:9).

In communion of service

212. We should not think of this mission of sharing Christ as something only between Jesus and me. Mission is experienced in fellowship with our communities and with the whole Church. If we turn aside from the community, we will be turning aside from Jesus. If we turn our back on the community, our friendship with Jesus will grow cold. This is a fact, and we must never forget it. Love for the brothers and sisters of our communities – religious, parochial, diocesan and others – is a kind of fuel that feeds our friendship with Jesus. Our acts of love for our brothers and sisters in community may well be the best and, at times, the only way that we can witness to others our love for Jesus Christ. He himself said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35).

213. This love then becomes service within the community. I never tire of repeating that Jesus told us this in the clearest terms possible: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). He now asks you to meet him there, in every one of our brothers and sisters, and especially in the poor, the despised and the abandoned members of society. What a beautiful encounter that can be!

214. If we are concerned with helping others, this in no way means that we are turning away from Jesus. Rather, we are encountering him in another way. Whenever we try to help and care for another person, Jesus is at our side. We should never forget that, when he sent his disciples on mission, “the Lord worked with them” (Mk 16:20). He is always there, always at work, sharing our efforts to do good. In a mysterious way, his love becomes present through our service. He speaks to the world in a language that at times has no need of words.

215. Jesus is calling you and sending you forth to spread goodness in our world. His call is one of service, a summons to do good, perhaps as a physician, a mother, a teacher or a priest. Wherever you may be, you can hear his call and realize that he is sending you forth to carry out that mission. He himself told us, “I am sending you out” (Lk 10:3). It is part of our being friends with him. For this friendship to mature, however, it is up to you to let him send you forth on a mission in this world, and to carry it out confidently, generously, freely and fearlessly. If you stay trapped in your own comfort zone, you will never really find security; doubts and fears, sorrow and anxiety will always loom on the horizon. Those who do not carry out their mission on this earth will find not happiness, but disappointment. Never forget that Jesus is at your side at every step of the way. He will not cast you into the abyss, or leave you to your own devices. He will always be there to encourage and accompany you. He has promised, and he will do it: “For I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

216. In your own way, you too must be a missionary, like the apostles and the first disciples of Jesus, who went forth to proclaim the love of God, to tell others that Christ is alive and worth knowing. Saint Therese experienced this as an essential part of her oblation to merciful Love: “I wanted to give my Beloved to drink and I felt myself consumed with a thirst for souls”. [227] That is your mission as well. Each of us must carry it out in his or her own way; you will come to see how you can be a missionary. Jesus deserves no less. If you accept the challenge, he will enlighten you, accompany you and strengthen you, and you will have an enriching experience that will bring you much happiness. It is not important whether you see immediate results; leave that to the Lord who works in the secret of our hearts. Keep experiencing the joy born of our efforts to share the love of Christ with others.

CONCLUSION

217. The present document can help us see that the teaching of the social Encyclicals 'Laudato Si' and Fratelli Tutti is not unrelated to our encounter with the love of Jesus Christ. For it is by drinking of that same love that we become capable of forging bonds of fraternity, of recognizing the dignity of each human being, and of working together to care for our common home.

218. In a world where everything is bought and sold, people's sense of their worth appears increasingly to depend on what they can accumulate with the power of money. We are constantly being pushed to keep buying, consuming and distracting ourselves, held captive to a demeaning system that prevents us from looking beyond our immediate and petty needs. The love of Christ has no place in this perverse mechanism, yet only that love can set us free from a mad pursuit that no longer has room for a gratuitous love. Christ's love can give a heart to our world and revive love wherever we think that the ability to love has been definitively lost.

219. The Church also needs that love, lest the love of Christ be replaced with outdated structures and concerns, excessive attachment to our own ideas and opinions, and fanaticism in any number of forms, which end up taking the place of the gratuitous love of God that liberates, enlivens, brings joy to the heart and builds communities. The wounded side of Christ continues to pour forth that stream which is never exhausted, never passes away, but offers itself time and time again to all those who wish to love as he did. For his love alone can bring about a new humanity.

220. I ask our Lord Jesus Christ to grant that his Sacred Heart may continue to pour forth the streams of living water that can heal the hurt we have caused, strengthen our ability to love and serve others, and inspire us to journey together towards a just, solidary and fraternal world. Until that day when we will rejoice in celebrating together the banquet of the heavenly kingdom in the presence of the risen Lord, who harmonizes all our differences in the light that radiates perpetually from his open heart. May he be blessed forever.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 24 October of the year 2024, the twelfth of my Pontificate.

(8389 words)

Note: the double lines indicate where sections of the document have been omitted.

NOTES:

[1] Many of the reflections in this first chapter were inspired by the unpublished writings of the late Father Diego Fares, S.J. May the Lord grant him eternal rest.

[2] Cf. HOMER, *Iliad*, XXI, 441.

[3] Cf. *Iliad*, X, 244.

[4] Cf. PLATO, *Timaeus*, 65 c-d; 70.

[5] *Homily at Morning Mass in Domus Sanctae Marthae*, 14 October 2016: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 15 October 2016, p. 8.

[6] SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Angelus*, 2 July 2000: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3-4 July, 2000, p.4

[7] ID., *Catechesis*, 8 June 1994: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9 June 1994, p. 5.

[10] KARL RAHNER, "Some Theses for a Theology of Devotion to the Sacred Heart", in *Theological Investigations*, vol. III, Baltimore-London, 1967, p. 332.

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[14] Cf. ID., *Agonie des Eros*, Berlin, 2012.

[15] Cf. MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, Frankfurt a. M., 1981, p. 120.

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[27] *Homily at Morning Mass in Domus Sanctae Marthae*, 7 June 2013: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 8 June 2013, p. 8.

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[166] IULIANUS IMP., Ep. XLIX *ad Arsacium Pontificem Galatiae*, Mainz, 1828, 90-91.

[167] IULIANUS IMP., Ep. XLIX *ad Arsacium Pontificem Galatiae*, Mainz, 1828, 90-91.

[168] DICASTERY FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Declaration Dignitas Infinita* (2 April 2024), 19: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 8 April 2024.

[169] Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Letter to the Superior General of the Society of Jesus on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Encyclical "Haurietis Aquas"* (15 May 2006): AAS 98 (2006), 461.

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[192] Letter to the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Paray-le-Monial, 5 October 1986: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 October 1986, p. 7.

[193] SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (2 December 1984), 16: AAS 77 (1985), 215.

[194] Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 36: AAS 80 (1988), 561- 562.

[195] Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 41: AAS 83 (1991), 844-845.

[196] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1888.

[197] *Catechesis*, 8 June 1994, 2: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4 May 1994, p. 5.

[198] Address to the Participants in the International Colloquium “*Réparer L'Irréparable*”, on the 350 th Anniversary of the Apparitions of Jesus in Paray-le-Monial, 4 May 2024: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4 May 2024, p. 12.

[199] Ibid.

[200] *Homily at Morning Mass in Domus Sanctae Marthae*, 6 March 2018: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 5-6 March 2018, p. 8.

[201] Address to the Participants in the International Colloquium “*Réparer L'Irréparable*”, on the 350th Anniversary of the Apparitions of Jesus in Paray-le-Monial, 4 May 2024: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4 May 2024, p. 12.

[202] *Homily at the Chrism Mass*, 28 March 2024: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 28 March 2024, p. 2.

[203] Ibid.

[204] Ibid.

[205] Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* (24 May 2015), 80: AAS 107 (2015), 879.

[206] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1085.

[207] Ibid., No. 268.

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[217] Cf. PIUS XI, Encyclical Letter *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, 8 May 1928: AAS 20 (1928), 169.

[218] Ibid.: AAS 20 (1928), 172.

[219] SAINT JOHN PAUL II , *Catechesis*, 20 June 1979: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 22 June 1979, p. 1.

[220] *Homily at Mass in Domus Sanctae Marthae*, 27 June 2014: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 28 June 2014, p. 8.

[221] *Message for the Centenary of the Consecration of the Human Race to the Divine Heart of Jesus, Warsaw*, 11 June 1999, Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 June 1999, p. 5.

[222] Ibid.

[223] *Letter to the Archbishop of Lyon on the occasion of the Pilgrimage of Paray-le-Monial for the Centenary of the Consecration of the Human Race to the Divine Heart of Jesus*, 4 June 1999: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 June 1999, p. 4.

[224] Conference, “*Repetition of Prayer*”, 22 August 1655.

[225] Letter *Diserti interpretes* (25 May 1965), 4: *Enchiridion della Vita Consacrata*, Bologna- Milano, 2001, n. 3809.

[226] *Vita Nuova XIX*, 5-6: “I declare that, in thinking of its worth, love so sweet makes me feel that, if my courage did not fail me, I would speak out and make everyone else fall in love”.

[227] Ms A, 45v.
