

PASTORAL LETTER OF THE ARCHBISHOPS AND BISHOPS OF AUSTRALASIA

ON THE OCCASION OF THE RE-CONSECRATION OF THE CATHOLIC PEOPLE OF THE COMMONWEALTH AND NEW ZEALAND TO THE MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS, JUNE 29, 1919.

Dearly Beloved Brethren and Dear Children in Jesus Christ,

At the Annual Conference of the Archbishops of Australasia held in Melbourne on the 7th, 8th, and 9th of October, 1918, it was the unanimous decision of the assembled prelates that the time was ripe for a movement towards the Consecration of Australasia to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. They had already noticed with great satisfaction that many individual homes were now being consecrated to that Adorable Heart, and that the devotion was receiving a great impetus everywhere. Although years ago a general consecration had taken place, it would be well to have it renewed, and the time most suitable for doing so would be about the Feast of the Sacred Heart this year, 1919. Accordingly, the secretary was instructed to communicate with the bishops about the proposed consecration, and steps were taken to have a joint Pastoral issued in preparation for such consecration. The object of this Pastoral consequently is the fulfilment of that purpose.

Never, perhaps, in the history of the world was the need of the Benediction and assistance of the Sacred Heart more urgent than now. After the terrible world-wide war, with its widespread devastations and myriad consequent woes in every direction, the nations are faced with problems of all kinds so serious and complex that no merely mundane wisdom is adequate for the momentous and far-reaching conclusions so urgently required and anxiously expected. The Governments of the world never more sorely needed illumination from on high, in order to govern wisely and well, and the people in all nations never required more enlightenment and strength willingly to receive and efficiently to carry out the wise decrees of the Governments for their material, social, and moral welfare. Hence the extreme urgency of having recourse to the merciful and benignant Heart of the King of Kings, that He may aid His people to live in accordance with the principles of justice and charity, the sources of true liberty, and duly to support, as they are in duty bound, the order of the civil progress of humanity.

It was the ardent desire of the Apostle of the Nations, St. Paul, that his converts in every land should be "able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth, to know also the

charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge." (Eph. iii. 18, 19.)

Now, there are many pious souls who do not know as well as they ought the precise object of the Devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; who do not sufficiently distinguish the difference between this devotion and that of the Passion or the Blessed Sacrament. It will therefore be advantageous, at the beginning of this Pastoral, to explain what we understand by the Heart of Jesus, and sketch briefly its qualities and powers. This will at the same time establish its special claims to our veneration, gratitude, and love.

Mankind have, as by common consent, chosen the heart as the symbol of their affections, their passions, and especially their love, the source of all the other affections. As by the *head* we understand not only that noble part of the body so called, but often also the intellectual faculties, of which it seems to be the seat, so by the *heart* we understand more than that fleshly vessel whose function is to diffuse life through every fibre of our frame. *The heart is the man*—man with all his variety of emotions and proclivities, likes and dislikes; man with his wonderful admixture of strength and weakness, fortitude and cowardice.

By His Incarnation, the Word of God became a real Son of man, true and perfect man, in such a way that the Divine nature and the human nature subsist in one and the same divine person, the Second Person of the Adorable Trinity. In this mystery He has united to His Divinity a heart like our own, and inherited through the immaculate blood of the Virgin Mary—who is our sister in Adam—the principle of our affections. But this heart, being that of a *God*, has characteristics vastly superior to ours. No doubt man's heart—despite the Fall—contains noble and godlike instincts. What examples, even in paganism, of disinterested love, friends dying for friends, husbands for wives, children for parents! What touching mother's love! What pure and exalted patriotism! Yet the human heart is very limited in its capacities, as man's mind is very limited in its intelligence. To put forth all its forces it needs concentration; they are weakened by dispersion. But we are not simply imperfect by nature. God's work in our souls has been sadly marred by sin, and it is in the heart that sin has made most havoc. It is unnecessary to say that the Heart of Jesus, the God man, has none of these defects.

1. *It is the most loving of all hearts.* Because love corresponds to knowledge, the faculty of loving must be as immeasurable in Christ as His immense intelligence. The ardor of the saints and that of the seraphic choirs combined, yea, that of the Queen of Angels herself, cannot reach the intensity of one sigh of the loving Heart of Jesus towards God, and, proportionately, the same holds good concerning His love for man; not originally, on account of any merits of ours,

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