

June 2010

Dear Friend of the Franciscan Missions!

On June 21, Summer begins, I hope that will be the beginning of a more restful time. There are a lot of special feasts in the month of June. June 6 is the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ The Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus is June 11, followed on June 12 by the Immaculate Heart of Mary. St. Anthony's feast is June 13 (it is on a Sunday this year so many places will celebrate it the next day. **We all pray for you in a special way on all the days they set aside for St. Anthony: Saturday, Sunday and Monday!** The Solemnity of St. John the Baptist is June 24, and the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, the patrons of the Church of Rome, is on June 29. Pray especially for Pope Benedict during this month and for the entire Church. June 20 is Fathers' Day. Pray for all our fathers, grandfathers, godfathers, and stepfathers, also those who have served in fatherly capacities—those who are living and those that have died. The Year for Priests ends on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart. Still keep priests in your prayers and pray for more vocations for clergy, religious and lay ministry in the Church.. As we keep St Anthony's feast, pray for those who are hungry, that bread and other food may come to the poor. Thank you for your generous support of our missions, your prayers and generosity make a big difference. Be assured of our prayers. Enjoy the summer! I have been appointed the pastor of the English-speaking parish for the archdiocese of Tokyo, I will still keep an association with the FMU and St. Anthony's Guild,. help with appeal letters, the monthly meditations and helping with the Anthonian.. Come visit, and keep those poor people of that community in your prayers! Check out on our website the *Sunday Readings*, the section provides a great way to prepare for Sunday Mass and reflect on the readings.

Sacred Heart

Fr. Russell Becker, O.F.M.

The blood mingled with water, which was shed from that pieced side, was the price of our salvation. Flowing from the hidden fount of the Sacred Heart, it gave the sacraments their power of conferring the life of grace, and to those already living in Christ a drought of the living font, gushing unto eternal life. {St. Bonaventure]

From very early in the life of the Church, reflection on the heart of Jesus was a theme important to the mystical theology of the Church's theologians. In the Bible, the heart was the center of all things. When Solomon was given permission by God to ask for anything, Solomon asked for wisdom. What is translated as "wisdom" by the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible is rendered a *listening heart* in the Hebrew Bible, an expression which captured the imagination of the community of Israel and all who sought guidance from God's inspired Word.

When Jesus saw the crowd longing for something,, his heart went out to them. He healed their sick, forgave them, fed them, made their hearts burn with anticipation. At the Last Supper, the beloved disciple rested on the breast of Jesus, surely calmed and soothed by the beating of Jesus' heart. When he died, blood and water flowed from the heart of Jesus when his side was pierced with a lance, and Thomas, after the resurrection, sought to place his hand in that wound to seek certitude that it was truly the Risen Jesus Christ. .

The blood and water that flowed from the heart of Christ was, for the early Church, a symbol of the Church that existed by virtue of the waters of Baptism and the Blood of the Eucharist.. From then on the Sacred Heart was the source of much mystical theology and spiritual support. In the Middle ages, St Bernard and St. Bonaventure, among many others, saw the Sacred Heart of Jesus as the font of divine-human love.

The modern sources for the devotion to the Sacred heart find roots in St. John Eudes and apparitions to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in the seventeenth century. At that time, the theme of the devotion turned to the idea of atonement, which comes from one of the revelations to St. Margaret Mary: *Behold the Heart which loved humanity so greatly, but which has been given so little love in return.*

Font of Divine Love. Our tradition never passes up an opportunity to reaffirm the basic truth of God's unconditional love that is showered upon us. The Bible constantly reminded Israel of God's love revealed in the work of creation and redemption. This awareness of God's love reached new levels with the coming of the Lord Jesus. The Paschal Mystery (his incarnation, life, death and resurrection) is the strongest witness to his love. This love was also enfleshed in the Church through the celebration of the sacraments and the ministry of the members to each other and to the world. In every age the Church has proclaimed this love to a world that often gives way to the temptations to violence, selfishness, greed and all kinds of other non-love activity. The Christ who stands before us is a wounded Christ who knows and understands the difficulties of life and has suffered because of them and for them. There is a face which is wounded by a crown of thorns, hands and feet wounded by the nails of the cross and a heart pierced by a soldier's lance. But this is the Jesus who is gentle and humble of heart and whose love is even extended to the enemy in forgiveness. Reflection on this Christ is a source of hope and strength and the image of what we are called to be: witnesses to God's unconditional and healing love. The Lord has set his heart on us and will not be put off even by our pettiness. In that love we are given the opportunity to share God's life for all eternity and to see the fulfillment of the promise of the Incarnation:

becoming like God by grace. This is the One on whom we can cast our cares without worry and in whom we will be sustained. This love never fails us. ***The thoughts of his heart last through every generation, that he will rescue them from death and feed them in time of need.***[Psalm 32,10-11: Entrance Antiphon for the Feast]

Atonement. Human history is rife with lack of response to God's love. The more we gain control over the secrets of the universe, the more we forget the One *in whom we live and move and have our being*. We take for granted that which is truly a gift. Even our offering of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving often becomes perfunctory. Many preachers have resorted to a rather vicious and vindictive picture of God in order to terrify people into faithfulness and gratitude. A spirituality based on unworthiness and fear does not proclaim the love of Christ. The Church offers as a corrective the image of the wounded Christ. As we look on the wounded Christ, can we finally answer the question that God has spoken for all the ages, especially in the wounded Christ: **See how much I love you?** The Gospel call to conversion is preached in a very poignant way. We will atone, if that is even a good word, for the mistakes of our ancestors and our own in failing to return God's love by learning to love again. We are taken back to the Epistle of John and reminded that since God has loved us so much, we should love: love God, love one another, love those who love us and love those who do not. In other words, love like God does. We, who have been richly cared for by God, must care for one another; we, who have been richly forgiven by God, must forgive one another; we, who have been granted so much peace, must work for peace, and we, who have been given so much dignity, must give dignity to one another. That is what brings the work of creation and salvation to fulfillment—the Kingdom of God.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart became popular at just the right time. People were so taken with their unworthiness that they rarely received communion. This devotion increased the frequency of communion, encouraged more ministry to the sick and helped prepare for the renewal of Vatican II which restored a healthy understanding of God's love and the gift of the Eucharist. Sometimes people's devotion had become mechanical—do the nine First Fridays and you will not die without the sacraments, but really the promises were just a proclamation of the Gospel of the love of God is a way accessible to people, that attracted and offered hope. People embraced the hope and it gave them the courage to approach the God of love. No Mechanical thing here, but a loving invitation to confidence in God and renewal of life.

Perhaps this quote from Cardinal Newman who will be beatified in the Fall, will help us to understand the constancy of God's love: ***In truth we are not called once only, but many times; all through our life Christ is calling us. He called us first in Baptism; but afterwards also; whether we obey his voice or not, he graciously calls us still. If we fall from Baptism, he calls us to repent; if we are striving to fulfill our calling, he calls us from grace to grace, and from holiness to holiness, while life is given us. Abraham was called from home (Gn 12), Peter from his nets (Mt 4,18), Elisha from his farm (1Kg 19,19), Nathaniel from his retreat (Jn 1,47); we are all in the course of calling, on and on, from one thing to another, having no resting-place, but mounting toward eternal rest, and obeying one command only to have another put upon us. He calls again and again, in order to justify us again and again, and again and again, and more and more, to sanctify and glorify us. It would be well if we understood this; but we are slow to master the great truth, that Christ is, as it were, walking among us, and by his hand, or eye, or voice, bidding us to follow him. We do not understand that his call is a thing which takes place now. We think it took place in the Apostle's days; but we do not believe in it, we do not look out for it in our own case.***

Such is the age old story of God's love and our response. Do not be afraid. When we are worried about God's love, what helps us calm the worry is the image Sacred Heart: ***See how much I love you?***

Questions for reflection:

1. How well do we appreciate God's love?
2. Do you worry about being able to be forgiven?
3. Are you tempted to fear that comes from a sense of unworthiness.
4. While we may all be able to say we are unworthy—who makes us worthy?
5. How can we respond better to the gift of God's love?

Please remember our missionaries on their birthdays:

June 2: Archbishop Roberto Gonzales, O.F.M. (Puerto Rico)

June 16: Fr. Paul Williams, O.F.M. (Home Missions)

June 21: Archbishop Luis Sainz, O.F.M. (Bolivia)

June 23: Fr. Emerson Rodriguez-Delgado, O.F.M. (Peru)

May the Spirit fill them with blessings, energy and peace!

Please remember our missionaries and former missionaries who are ill:

Fr. Ignatius McGeedy, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Aloysius Siracuse, O.F.M. (Brazil)

Fr. Boniface Hanley, O.F.M. (Bolivia)

Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)

Fr. Peter Sheridan, O.F.M. (Home Missions)

Fr. Stanislaus Widomski, O.F.M. (Japan)