



# The Holy See

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## **LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II ON THE 100th ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONSECRATION OF THE HUMAN RACE TO THE DIVINE HEART OF JESUS**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

1. The 100th anniversary of the Consecration of the Human Race to the Divine Heart of Jesus, prescribed for the whole Church by my Predecessor Leo XIII in the Encyclical Letter *Annum sacrum* (25 May 1899: *Leonis XIII P. M. Acta*, XIX [1899], 71- 80) and carried out on 11 June 1899, prompts us first of all to give thanks to "him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (Rv 1:5-6).

This happy occasion seems a particularly appropriate one for reflecting on the meaning and value of that important ecclesial act. With the Encyclical *Annum sacrum*, Pope Leo XIII confirmed all that had been done by his Predecessors carefully to preserve and highlight the devotion and spirituality of the Sacred Heart. With that consecration he wished to obtain "extraordinary benefits first for Christianity, but also for the whole human race" (*Annum sacrum*, p. 71). Asking that not only believers but all people should be consecrated, he gave a new direction and sense to the consecration which had already been practised for two centuries by individuals, groups, Dioceses and nations.

The consecration of the human race to the Heart of Jesus was thus presented by Leo XIII as "the summit and crowning of all the honours which have been customarily paid to the Most Sacred Heart" (*Annum sacrum*, p. 72). Such a consecration, the Encyclical explains, is owed to Christ, Redeemer of the human race, for what he is in himself and for what he has done for human beings. Since in the Sacred Heart the believer encounters the symbol and the living image of the infinite love of Christ, which in itself spurs us to love one another, he cannot fail to recognize the need to participate personally in the work of salvation. For this reason every member of the Church is invited to see consecration as the giving and binding of oneself to Jesus Christ, the King "of prodigal sons", the King of all who are waiting to be led "into the light of God and of his kingdom" (*Formula of Consecration*). Consecration thus understood is to be joined to the missionary activity of the Church herself, because it answers the desire of Jesus' Heart to propagate in the world, through the members of his Body, his total dedication to the kingdom, and to unite the Church ever more closely to his offering to the Father and his being for others.

The value of what took place on 11 June 1899 was authoritatively confirmed in the writings of my Predecessors, who offered doctrinal reflections on the devotion to the Sacred Heart and mandated the periodic renewal of the act of consecration. Among these I am pleased to recall the holy successor of Leo XIII, Pope Pius X, who directed in 1906 that the consecration be renewed every year; Pope Pius XI of revered memory, who recalled it in his Encyclicals *Quas primas*, in the context of the Holy Year of 1925, and in *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, his successor, the Servant of God Pius XII, who treated it in his Encyclicals *Summi Pontificatus* and *Haurietis aquas*. The Servant of God Paul VI, then, in the light of the Second Vatican Council, wished to make reference to it in his Apostolic Epistle *Investigabiles divitias* and in his Letter *Diserti interpretes*, addressed on 25 May 1965 to Major Superiors of institutes named after the Heart of Jesus.

I too have not failed on several occasions to invite my Brothers in the Episcopate, priests, religious and the faithful to cultivate in their lives the most genuine forms of devotion to the Heart of Christ. In this year dedicated to God the Father, I recall what I wrote in the Encyclical *Dives in misericordia*: "The Church seems in a particular way to profess the mercy of God and to venerate it when she directs herself to the Heart of Christ. In fact, it is precisely this drawing close to Christ in the mystery of his Heart which enables us to dwell on this point - a point in a sense central and also most accessible on the human level - of the revelation of the merciful love of the Father, a revelation which constituted the central content of the messianic mission of the Son of Man" (n. 13). On the occasion of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart and the month of June, I have often urged the faithful to persevere in the practice of this devotion, which "contains a message which in our day has an extraordinary timeliness", because "an unending spring of life, giving hope to every person, has streamed precisely from the Heart of God's Son, who died on the Cross. From the Heart of Christ crucified is born the new humanity redeemed from sin. The man of the year 2000 needs Christ's Heart to know God and to know himself; he needs it to build the civilization of love" (8 June 1994; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 15 June 1994, p. 3).

The consecration of the human race in 1899 represents an extraordinarily important step on the Church's journey and it is still good to renew it every year on the feast of the Sacred Heart. The same should be said of the Act of Reparation which is customarily recited on the feast of Christ the King. The words of Leo XIII still ring true: "We must have recourse to him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We have gone astray and we must return to the right path; darkness has overshadowed our minds, and the gloom must be dispelled by the light of truth; death has seized upon us, and we must lay hold of life" (*Annum sacrum*, p. 78). Is this not the programme of the Second Vatican Council and of my own Pontificate?

2. As we prepare to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, this centenary helps us to reflect with hope on our humanity and to see the third millennium illumined by the light of the mystery of Christ, "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6).

In stating that "the imbalances under which the modern world labours are linked with that more basic imbalance rooted in the human heart" (Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, n. 10), faith happily discovers that "it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear" (ibid., n. 22), since "by his Incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, acted with a human will and loved with a human heart" (ibid.). God has so willed that the baptized

Christian, "associated with the paschal mystery and configured to the death of Christ", should hasten "forward to the resurrection strengthened by hope", but this holds true "also for all people of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way" (ibid.). "All human beings", as the Second Vatican Council reminds us, "are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we come, through whom we live and towards whom we are led" (Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, n. 3).

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church authoritatively states that "by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the baptized are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the works of Christians they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the marvellous works of him who called them out of darkness into his wonderful light (cf. 1 Pt 2:4-10). Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (cf. Acts 2:42-47), should offer themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1). They should everywhere on earth bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them" (ibid., n. 10). In facing the challenge of the new evangelization, the Christian who looks upon the Heart of Christ and consecrates himself as well as his brothers and sisters to him, the Lord of time and history, rediscovers that he is the bearer of his light. Motivated by this spirit of service, he cooperates in opening to all human beings the prospect of being raised to their own personal and communal fullness. "From the Heart of Christ, man's heart learns to know the genuine and unique meaning of his life and of his destiny, to understand the value of an authentically Christian life, to keep himself from certain perversions of the human heart, and to unite the filial love of God with love of neighbour" (*Message to the Society of Jesus*, 5 October 1986; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 27 October 1986, p. 7).

I wish to express my approval and encouragement to all who in any way continue to foster, study and promote devotion to the Heart of Christ in the Church with language and forms adapted to our times, so that it may be transmitted to future generations in the spirit which has always animated it. The faithful still need to be guided to contemplate adoringly the mystery of Christ, the God-Man, in order to become men and women of interior life, people who feel and live the call to new life, to holiness, to reparation which is apostolic cooperation in the salvation of the world, people who prepare themselves for the new evangelization, recognizing the Heart of Christ as the heart of the Church: it is urgent for the world to understand that Christianity is the religion of love.

The Saviour's Heart invites us to return to the Father's love, which is the source of every authentic love: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10). Jesus ceaselessly receives from the Father, rich in mercy and compassion, the love which he lavishes upon human beings (cf. Eph 2:4; Jas 5:11). His Heart particularly reveals the generosity of God towards sinners. God's reaction to sin is not to lessen his love, but to expand it into a flow of mercy which becomes the initiative of the Redemption.

Contemplation of the Heart of Jesus in the Eucharist will spur the faithful to seek in that Heart the

inexhaustible mystery of the priesthood of Christ and of the Church. It will enable them to taste, in communion with their brothers and sisters, the spiritual sweetness of charity at its very source. By helping all to rediscover their own Baptism, it will make them more aware of having to live their apostolic dimension by spreading love and participating in the mission of evangelization. Each person needs to be more committed to praying the Lord of the harvest (cf. Mt 9:38) to grant the Church "shepherds after his own heart" (Jer 3:15) who, in love with Christ the Good Shepherd, will pattern their own hearts on his and be ready to go out into the highways of the world to proclaim to all that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, n. 82). To this we must add effective action so that many of today's young people, docile to the voice of the Holy Spirit, may be taught to let the great expectations of the Church and of humanity resonate in the depths of their hearts and to respond to Christ's invitation to consecrate themselves enthusiastically and joyously with him "for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51).

3. The coincidence of this centenary with the last year of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which is "aimed at broadening the horizons of believers, so that they will see things in the perspective of Christ: in the perspective of the 'Father who is in heaven' (cf. Mt. 5:45)" (Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 49) offers a fitting opportunity to present the Heart of Jesus, "the burning furnace of love, ... the symbol and the expressive image of the eternal love with which 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son' (Jn 3:16)" (Paul VI, Apostolic Epistle *Investigabiles divitias*). The Father is love (1 Jn 4:8, 16), and the only-begotten Son, Christ, manifests this mystery while fully revealing man to man.

Devotion to the Heart of Jesus has given form to the prophetic words recalled by St John: "They shall look on him whom they have pierced" (Jn 19:37; cf. Zec 12:10). It is a contemplative gaze, "which strives to enter deeply into the sentiments of Christ, true God and true man. In this devotion the believer confirms and deepens the acceptance of the mystery of the Incarnation, which has made the Word one with human beings and thus given witness to the Father's search for them. This seeking is born in the intimate depths of God, who loves man eternally in the Word, and wishes to raise him in Christ to the dignity of an adoptive son" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 7). At the same time devotion to the Heart of Jesus searches the mystery of the Redemption in order to discover the measure of love which prompted his sacrifice for our salvation.

The Heart of Christ is alive with the action of the Holy Spirit, to whom Jesus attributed the inspiration of his mission (Lk 4:18; cf. Is 61:1) and whose sending he had promised at the Last Supper. It is the Spirit who enables us to grasp the richness of the sign of Christ's pierced side, from which the Church has sprung (cf. Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 5). "The Church, in fact", as Paul VI wrote, "was born from the pierced Heart of the Redeemer and from that Heart receives her nourishment, for Christ "gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Eph 5:25-26)" (Letter *Diserti interpretes*). Through the Holy Spirit, then, the love which permeates the Heart of Jesus is poured out in the hearts of men (cf. Rom 5:5), and moves them to adoration of his "unsearchable riches" (Eph 3:8)

and to filial and trusting petition to the Father (cf. Rom 8:15-16) through the Risen One who "always lives to make intercession for us" (Heb 7:25).

4. Devotion to the Heart of Christ, "the universal seat of communion with God the Father; ... seat of the Holy Spirit" (8 June 1994; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition 15 June 1994, p. 3), aims at strengthening our bond with the Holy Trinity. Thus, the celebration of the centenary of the consecration of the human race to the Sacred Heart prepares the faithful for the Great Jubilee, because it concerns its objective of "giving glory to the Trinity, from whom everything in the world and in history comes and to whom everything returns" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 55), and because of its orientation to the Eucharist (cf. *ibid.*), in which the life that Christ came to bring in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10) is communicated to those who feed on him in order to have life because of him (cf. Jn 6:57). The entire devotion to the Heart of Jesus in its every manifestation is profoundly Eucharistic: it is expressed in religious practices which stir the faithful to live in harmony with Christ, "meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29), and it is intensified in adoration. It is rooted and finds its summit in participation in Holy Mass, especially Sunday Mass, where the hearts of the faithful, fraternally assembled in joy, listen to the word of God and learn to offer with Christ themselves and the whole of their lives (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 48). There they are nourished at the paschal banquet of the Redeemer's Body and Blood and, sharing fully the love which beats in his Heart, they strive to be ever more effective evangelizers and witnesses of solidarity and hope.

We give thanks to God, our Father, who has revealed his love in the Heart of Christ and has consecrated us by the anointing of the Holy Spirit (cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, n. 10) so that, in union with Christ, we may adore him in every place and by our holy actions consecrate to him the world itself (*ibid.*, n. 34) and the new millennium.

Conscious of the great challenge that lies before us, we call upon the help of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church. May she guide the People of God across the threshold of the millennium soon to begin. May she enlighten them on the ways of faith, hope and love! In particular, may she help every Christian to live with generous consistency the consecration to Christ which has its basis in the sacrament of Baptism and is fittingly confirmed in personal consecration to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, in whom alone humanity can find forgiveness and salvation.

*Warsaw, 11 June 1999, Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.*

**JOHN PAUL II**

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