

HONOURING THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

(FEAST-DAY JUNE 3)

Along the path of life we come across both selfish and unselfish people. To which group do you and I belong? Perhaps we are a mixture of both generosity and selfishness. But to the extent that we may still be partly selfish, self-centred, and self-indulgent, we are not living the message of Jesus: *'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends'* (John 15:12-13).

Our devotion to the Sacred Heart, which is honouring God's love shown in Jesus, is meant to be both human, humane, and practical. Jesus lived his entire life for God and others. Speaking God's love to people, showing them God's love, and living God's love for them, that's what Jesus of Nazareth was all about. He practised no racism, no apartheid, and no discrimination. To rich and poor, powerful and powerless alike, he reached out with unstinting love. Nobody was excluded from the love burning in his great heart. He died just as he had lived - with love and generosity, kindness, compassion and forgiveness in his heart.

Ever since, hundreds and thousands of his followers have lived his example and commandment. I'm thinking of so many good mothers and fathers, who have given everything they could to the care of their children, friends, neighbours and strangers. I'm thinking of so many religious, men and women, who have laid down their lives in the service of others, and even more especially of religious Sisters, today an endangered species. In recent times in the press and other media both here and overseas, there has been an outpouring of love, appreciation and gratitude for the lives and work of religious Sisters.

For the ways they have befriended people on the margins! For how they have educated, often completely free of charge, a countless number of children of poor families! For their pastoral care and kindness to patients in hospitals! For their visits to lonely and troubled prisoners in jail cells! For their shelter and support to abused and hurting mothers and children! The list of their good deeds is endless. The example of their humble and generous service leaves us in no doubt that the meaning of life is to become like Jesus, a loving, caring person.

A particularly striking example of faithful caring love is the Australian Sister of St Joseph, Irene McCormack. On her mission to the Pueblo people of Peru she was martyred by Marxist guerrillas on Tuesday, May 21st, 1991. She may be recognised as Australia's next Saint.

Irene left Australia for Peru in 1987. Her aim was to keep bringing God's love and literacy to poor and marginalised persons, just as she had done in Australia. She understood that going into Peru was to go into the unknown, but with trust in God. She noted that her life among the people there was *'a gift'* from God. In the village of Huasahuasi high up in the Andes mountain range, she ran a simple village school and library for the local children, led prayer services on Sundays when the priest was away, and supervised a community kitchen from which she distributed food to poor families. This helped to supplement nutrition from the potatoes and

maize they grew themselves. But the thugs who shot her sentenced her, so they said, for 'pushing "Yankee" food' and 'bringing in books' 'to push "Yankee" ideas'.

Getting to know such saints of our times is to be inspired to imitate them in their constant unselfish generosity. Of course this is a big ask. But with God on our side, surely we can do better and become better persons than we are already. For this to happen to us, let us make our own again and again St Ignatius Loyola's famous Prayer for Generosity, for the generosity, in fact, of the Sacred Heart of Jesus:

*Lord, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to ask for any reward
but that of knowing that I do your will.*

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