

MONTHLY SPIRITUAL MESSAGE FOR MARCH 2011

PEACE IS BORN OF A NEW HEART

St Francis knew what it was like to have a new heart born of a profound and joyful penance, forgiveness and peace. This peaceful heart arose from the strength that came out his personal relationship with family and with the Lord Jesus. His heart was slowly stripped of all its false images and gods, by the grace of the Lord through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Francis' conversion was gradual and contained all the heart rendering conditions that arise, as one comes into the "Presence of that all Consuming Love" (Heb...) During this conversion process Francis could already see the footprints of God around him. Francis never looked at the world in a dualistic manner. He saw that his *God was one of Perfection, all good and most High and supreme Good*. Francis' conversion process was such that he underwent a self emptying that allowed him through prayer and fasting to *see his Lord fastened to a Cross (Bonaventure) and to see his Lord in the meeting with that Leper and later he could say, "When I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers, and the Lord led me among them and I showed mercy to them."* (1 Celano: ch.7.) Francis' new heart was the result of many through which he encountered the Living Christ who formed Francis' new heart which was marked with the signs of Christ's Passion. In addition, his heart was nourished through uninterrupted contemplative prayer, attendance of the Eucharist and his service to the lepers and the poor that the Lord sent him to care for and share the Gospel with.

We can continue in the same vein about a heart born of peace that also calls out to us today. One may ask, "From where does a new heart filled with peace and joy that can sustain us in suffering come from?" We can answer that question by looking at a few biblical texts that speak directly to us today as they may have spoken to Francis, who prayed incessantly to the Lord for an answer to his prayers and as a result a heart his heart was filled with peace and joy. In Luke's gospel we read, "*Mary kept all those things and pondered them in her heart.*" (2.19) In Paul's Letter to the Galatians we read, "*Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son, into our hearts, crying out Abba Father.*" (4:6)

I offer you three reflections that might help you to understand the significance of the heart according to those texts. Firstly, the heart is not only the centre of feelings and sentiments, but it is also the profound place where our 'persona' takes consciousness of itself, reflects on the happenings around it meditates on the sense and source of these realities, assumes responsible attitudes and choices or the facts of life and the mystery of God. Secondly, I would like to underline the decisive importance of the heart in the order of salvation. Cardinal Carlo Martini SJ, says, "In the Letter of Paul to the Galatians he writes "*...When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*" (4:4-5) Jesus then, is present in our history as Son, Redeemer and Liberator. But the divine salvific action becomes realistically effective in

human history only through our hearts, which by the strength and light of the Holy Spirit, became our hearts animated by filial love towards God. "(p.4.)

As we read in Luke's gospel that the mere presence of Jesus among men does not bring about salvation in the world. No we need to allow his piercing Word of life and light to penetrate into the depth of our innermost places of the heart where, his Spirit shines forth in splendour and light. The Spirit's Presence shows us in our hearts, those false images, prophets and gods that we so often listen to and pay attention to. So what now? We must get rid of these false gods and give ourselves completely to the operation of the Holy Spirit to cleanse us from these false gods and images and to allow Him to take over the whole of our hearts and minds, with his all powerful voice. The Spirit who is poured into our hearts makes us co-heirs with Christ and we too can cry out "*Abba Father.*"

Yet there are those who are filled with self-righteousness and ignore the words of Christ and the call of the Holy Spirit to repentance. The presence of Jesus cannot become the source of salvation until our hearts rest in the heart of the Good Shepherd, hence, we empty them. When we rid our hearts of all self-righteousness we too can "*Ponder those things of the Lord in our hearts like Mary our Mother.*" Thirdly, the point concerning the particular fullness of life in the heart finds in itself, when going out of itself so to speak it meets the new absolute love, i.e., the Love that was manifested in Jesus the Incarnate Word of God.

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