

## ***Conference of National Spiritual Assistants*** **Secular Franciscan Order**

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MONTHLY SPIRITUAL MESSAGE FOR THE MONTH OF JUNE 2022

### **The Sacred Heart and the Franciscan Connection**

Fr. Anthony Fox OFM Conv.



When people contemplate the Sacred Heart of Jesus, not many will equate this devotion with the Franciscan Order. Our thoughts immediately turn to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and the apparitions she received from the Sacred Heart and the messages.

From the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, we have St. Bonaventure's work "Lignum Vitae" (The Tree of Life). He wrote and began to point out that the heart is the fountain from which God's love poured into our lives.

"Take thought now, redeemed man, and consider how great and worthy is he who hangs on the cross for you. His death brings the dead to life, but at his passing heaven

and earth are plunged into mourning and hard rocks are split asunder. It was a divine decree that permitted one of the soldiers to open his sacred side with a lance. This was done so that the Church might be formed from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death on the cross, and so that the Scripture might be fulfilled. *'They shall look upon him whom they have pierced.'* The blood and water, which poured out at that moment, were the price of our salvation. Flowing from the secret abyss of Our Lord's heart as from a fountain, this stream gave the sacraments of the Church the power to confer the life of grace, while for those already living in Christ, it became the spring of living water welling up to life everlasting."

Also, in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, we find the immensely popular devotional 'Vita Mystica' (the Mystical Vine) a lengthy devotional to Jesus, which vividly describes the 'Sacred Heart' as the font and fullness of love poured out into the world. This work is also attributed to St. Bonaventure.

This devotion was inspired by the life and teachings of St. Francis of Assisi. It is also not that well known that St. Francis was St. Margaret Mary's 'soul guide' for her apostolic life. St. Margaret Mary wrote, "After I had seen all this, the Divine Bridegroom, as a token of His love, gave me St. Francis as my soul's guide. He was to lead me through all the pains and sufferings that awaited me."

Francis came to understand that the central focus of devotion to the Sacred Heart is love. Francis' spirituality of the heart is one that cherishes three hearts as one: God's heart, our heart, and the heart of the universe. The Sacred Heart has preserved for all of us this same meaning. In our Franciscan life we are both comforted and challenged by it.

The Sacred Heart is God's zeal for communion with the human world. This was consummated in the Incarnation of our Saviour Jesus Christ and continues in the ongoing incarnation of the Divine Life in each of us by Grace. Our spiritual destiny as Franciscans is to show the love that is in the Heart of Jesus because that love is who we are really meant to be by our Baptism and our Profession. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the heart we had before we were born, the heart that remains in us all through life that does not die when we do. Spiritual practice is focused on letting that reality become visible in our lifetime. In fact, which is why we were given a lifetime.

St. Francis and St. Bonaventure tell of a God who is no longer distant but of a God who has come close, as close as our very own within, as close as between us all, as close as around us all. St. Francis exemplified the unity that is abiding and that powerfully endures within time and beyond it. Jesus is the model that human and divine in one being and built on Grace.

It is in the love of the Sacred Heart that our vocation as Franciscans to rebuild the Mystical Body, the Church. What tools are we use to restore peace, to repair sin, to increase grace, in effect change the world? It is simple that we are the tools to rebuild the Church and so we must become holy. For no matter what has caused the wounds in the Body of Christ today, they are spiritual wounds. That means the healing of them is spiritual as well. Become holy is a quite simple answer, but the most arduous task possible for us, for Jesus alone is 'holy.' Franciscans become holy by

becoming lovers. We must fall in love with Jesus our Beloved, and be on fire with that Love, which is the Holy Spirit, that love by which Jesus desired to set the world on fire.

For it is by loving God that Franciscans seek to acquire virtue, unlike other schools of spirituality which seek the acquisition of virtue to arrive at love. The Secular Franciscan Constitutions gives us practical means, and particular devotions, by which we can arrive at this burning charity for God and his Church. It tells us that holiness, “The union with Christ ..... is renewed and strengthened by participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Consequently, Secular Franciscans shall be on fire with love for the most sublime Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. (GC 56.6 Art 57.7) The following practices are strongly recommended: the reading of Sacred Scripture, Spiritual Reading, the recitation of the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary or the Franciscan Crown and the Consecration of the family to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. The Franciscan devotion to the Eucharist and the Sacred Heart helps us become lovers of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Eucharist and its benefits are not limited to the time we are in Church. We are to make the Mass extend throughout our entire day by placing our works, joys, and sufferings. We Franciscan lovers of Jesus Christ are called to do even more than that, for in each Mass, we also make our nuptials with our Beloved. Throughout our day, we should remain aware of our union with Jesus uniting ourselves to the Mass so that the complete day is sanctified and becomes a Mass because all that we say or do is for love of Jesus. It is Jesus alone who gives us the grace to accomplish what we are called to do.

The Sacred Heart devotion is a crusade to restore the rights of Christ, the King of Love, and the reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. For it is our heart, our love which is the measure of our holiness. When we meet Jesus at our judgment, it is not our merits which we will present to Him, for what have we that we have not been given? The question he will ask is “Do you love me? Does your heart belong only to me?” In this month of June let us implore the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the burning furnace of love, to enkindle our hearts with its fire, so that we members of the Secular Franciscan Order may be passionate lovers of the Lord Jesus Christ and him Crucified. Most Sacred Heart of Jesus have mercy on us! God bless you all!

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National Spiritual Assistant