

JUNE—THE MONTH OF THE SACRED HEART

Next month will be the thirty-fifth anniversary of my father's death. He died of a heart attack in Abington Hospital. He had a second heart attack while in the hospital and that is what took his life. A heart attack. We all have an understanding of that expression. A person is stricken and it is their heart which is under assault. Later we learned he suffered from heart disease. Not heart failure but blocked arteries. We are all familiar with the various things that affect the beating heart within our chest cavities. We are familiar with our heart rate or the possibility of a heart murmur. We speak of heart burn which doesn't really have much to do with the heart. But there is no other bodily organ quite like it. It beats 60, 70, 80 times a minute each minute all day long, all throughout our lives. Mostly we pay little or no attention. But your heart and my heart typically beat over 100,000 each day. Our hearts are pretty amazing.

But because they are so significant physiologically we often refer to our human heart metaphorically. We open our hearts to another. We express heartfelt sorrow and are invited to eat a hearty breakfast. Here at Saint Anthony our parish motto is where heart speaks to heart. At times we get heavy-hearted and at other times take a light-hearted approach to life. We get weighed down by life and find ourselves in the heart of darkness. And at other times we stand strong and assume the stance of Braveheart. And there are not many of us who have escaped genuine heartbreak on occasion and sometimes we have actually had our hearts broken over and over again.

And then of course there is the heart of Valentine's Day. It is the worldwide sign of love. Love and the human heart. Perfect together. So much of what I have outlined in cursory fashion is familiar to us and forms the backdrop for our understanding of Jesus under the title of the Sacred Heart. June is the month of the Sacred Heart. In the stained glass window to my left the Sacred Heart of Jesus is depicted. The heart is visible, it is encircled with a crown of thorns. It has a cross emanating from the center of it and at the base of the cross are flames signifying the divine love in the heart of Our Lord. There is a wound in the heart and a drop of blood flowing from it.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus is a symbol that is rich and deep and profound and yet rather easy to understand and straightforward and simple. Jesus is wounded and suffers death. His blood is shed. He is crowned in mocking fashion with a circlet of thorns. His heart and the cross are forever melded into one reality and there is visible the flame of his love for you and for me. The deeper truth revealed is that

there is a divine heart and that the heart within our breast is made in the image and likeness of this heart. We believe in the resurrection of the body, we say so in the Apostle's Creed. Is that a resurrected body but without a heart? Could that even be? Then there will be a transformed heart within our breast forever in the kingdom.

God has created the human heart and we must be clear. It was not created just for human loving here on earth. Of course, that. But our hearts have been created with the possibility of being caught up in love of God's own awesome love. But that doesn't just happen. We have to want that to happen. We have to do the things that will enable that to happen. We have to begin to live the kingdom life where that will happen forever but do so right here and right now. The heart is truly the instrument of genuine love. My heart is made for love. Your heart is made for love. If we do not learn how to love and I mean really love (Not just those close to us or those we like) then we will have failed our very purpose for living. If we do not learn how to allow another's love into our lives—on their terms, in their way, to the extent they want, in the fashion they choose, in the moment they decide—then we will have failed our purpose for living. Our hearts are made for his heart, union with his heart, communion with his heart. Love in our temporal, human lives is the condition for the possibility of our own love being transformed into an eternal love, joined to a divine love.

Whether we ever “get” this or not, it is going on all around us and within us as well. Some “get” it. All can “get” it but we have to ask and we have to want it. What does it look like? The Old Testament reading and the gospel reading give illustrations. Elijah listens to the cry of the widow for her dead son, he breathes God's life breath back into the boy and restores him to his mother. God's heart is a heart of loving care for the poor and needy. God's heart gives life. Our hearts must learn to be that too. And Jesus' heart goes out to another widow with a dead son and draws him from his funeral procession to return him to his mother. God, in Christ, is all about life—not death. God is present in our moments of profound loss when death draws near. His heart brings life and comforts the mourning soul. If we let it. If we believe. If we open our hearts.

But we must be clear. This life is hard. Its work. It is hard work. It taxes us and makes demands on us. But our hearts are sturdier than we know. They are made for the long haul. If you beat 100,000 time a day, 365 days a year for all the years of our lives, then you are made for the long haul. Sturdy. Reliable. Strong. Capable. Filled with love. The human heart made in the image and likeness of the very Sacred Heart of the Incarnate Word of God. Let us give thanks to the heart of God and be glad we are so wonderfully made.