



Ask, Father James:

What does praying to the Heart of Jesus mean? Why separate his heart from his body?

Praying or devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is not a dualistic division of Jesus Christ. It is a meditation with intention to connect with the pulse and beat of his divine love so as to attain union with His divine heart. The heart of Jesus is the core and seat of compassion. Jesus invites all who are carrying heavy burden to come to him. He says; "learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart" He tells us that He is gentle and humble of heart (Matthew 11:29). The Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus recalls Christ's love for us. We recall Christ's unconditional love exemplified in the blood and water which poured forth from Christ's heart in his sacrifice on the cross.

The heart is the natural symbol of love and affection. God created us out of love and when we became overwhelmed by sin, out of love, God sent Jesus into the world to come save us (John 3:16). Jesus' heart is always moved with pity when he sees crowds coming towards him (Matthew 9:36) and when he was raised on the cross, Jesus' side was pierced by the soldier's spear and "immediately there came out blood and water" (John 19:34-35). He was pierced for our sin because Jesus gave himself up for us with a wonderful love. This piercing came to be understood as a wound of love in His heart and in patristic thought, the blood and water is symbolic of the sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism, His outstretched hands from on top of the cross is his invitation to us to embrace his love for us with open heart.

The spirituality of devotion to the Most Sacred Heart grew out of the understanding that the Heart of God and human hearts is interconnected but became dislodged due to sin, but is now bridged by the Heart of Jesus. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that the prayer of the Church venerates and honours the Heart of Jesus just as it invokes his most holy name. It adores the incarnate Word and his Heart which, out of love for men, he allowed to be pierced by our sins. Christian prayer loves to follow the way of the cross in the Saviour's steps (CCC # 2669). And Pope Francis, through his weekly address on Wednesday 17 June, 2020 said; "I invite you to discover the riches that are hidden in the Heart of Jesus, to learn to love your neighbour."

In the 11th century, pious Christians started to meditate on the Five Wounds of Christ to connect to his heart and in the 17th-century, a French nun and mystic, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque had multiple visions of the Sacred Heart between 1673 and 1675 and she revealed twelve promises made by Jesus to those who honour his sacred heart. Jesus asked that the modern Feast of the Sacred Heart be celebrated each year on the Friday following Corpus Christi, in reparation for the ingratitude of men for the sacrifice which Christ had made for them and that the faithful to receive Him in the Eucharist frequently, especially on the First Friday of the month, and to observe a Holy Hour of devotion to Him.

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