

Catholic

UPDATE

KEEPING CATHOLICS
UP TO DATE SINCE 1973

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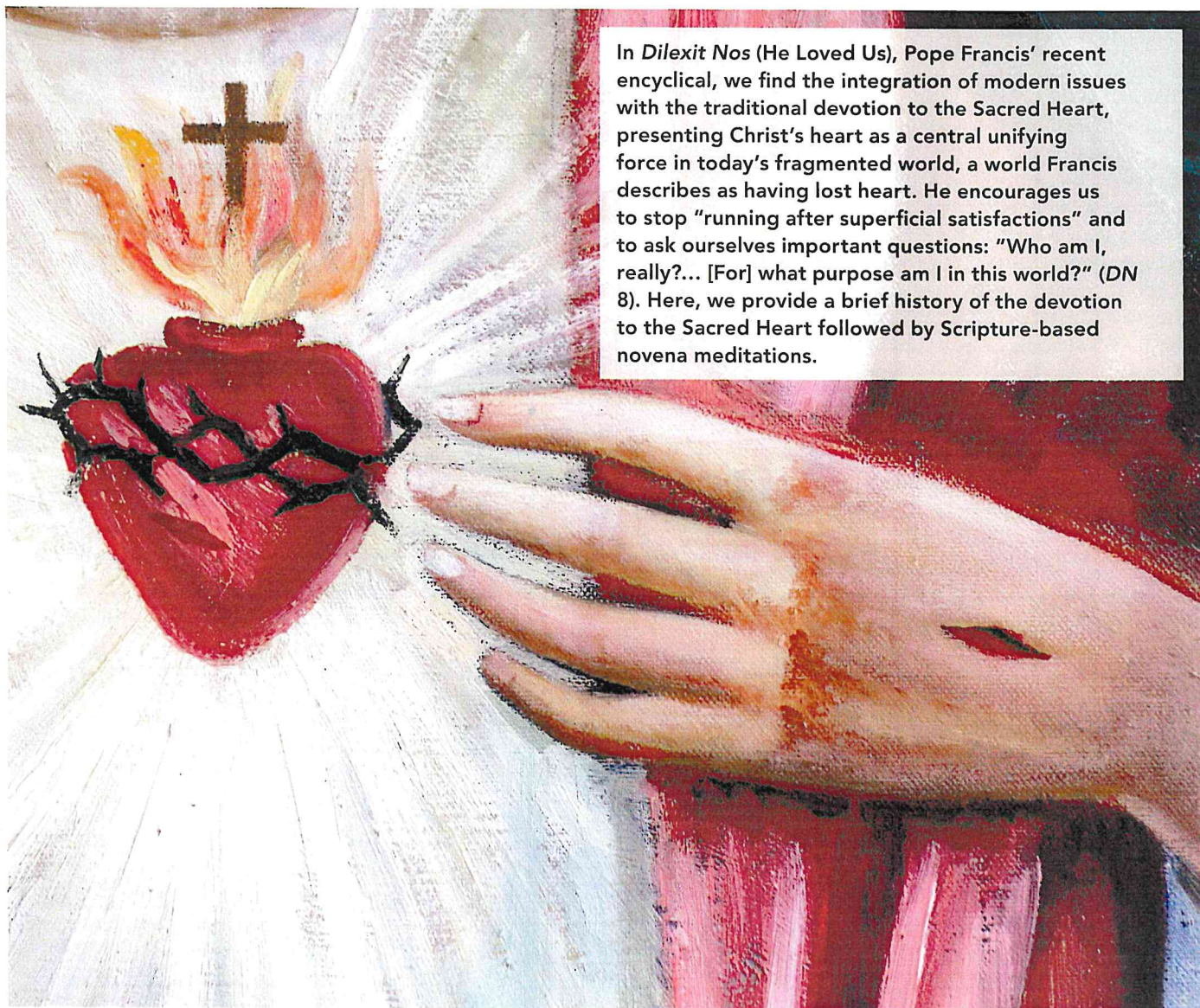
FEBRUARY 2025

Catholic Traditions WHAT WE DO AND WHY WE DO IT

Devotion to the Sacred Heart

REKINDLING HOPE IN A TROUBLED WORLD

A REDEMPTORIST PASTORAL PUBLICATION



In *Dilexit Nos* (He Loved Us), Pope Francis' recent encyclical, we find the integration of modern issues with the traditional devotion to the Sacred Heart, presenting Christ's heart as a central unifying force in today's fragmented world, a world Francis describes as having lost heart. He encourages us to stop "running after superficial satisfactions" and to ask ourselves important questions: "Who am I, really?... [For] what purpose am I in this world?" (DN 8). Here, we provide a brief history of the devotion to the Sacred Heart followed by Scripture-based novena meditations.

What Is a Novena?

Traditionally, a novena is a prayer or set of prayers repeated for nine consecutive days. However, a novena can just as well be accomplished in nine consecutive hours of one day or be spread out to include one day each week for nine consecutive weeks. A novena of First Fridays means participating in the Eucharist on the first Friday of each month for nine consecutive months. Whether prayed in one day or over a period of days, weeks, or months, a novena helps us form a habit of perseverance in prayer. Novenas in honor of Jesus are moments of shared friendship with him. Through these prayers and devotions, we bring Christ into our lives and share with him our concerns and the needs of the world.

Novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Devotion to the Sacred Heart focuses attention on the physical heart of Jesus as the symbol of his love for us. The heart is a common symbol of love. On Valentine's Day, we exchange cards decorated with hearts and give candy in heart-shaped boxes. Those hearts symbolize our affection for another. In our close relationships, the love we express is from the very core of our being. Likewise, the heart of Christ, in its sacredness and purity, symbolizes the place from which emanates God's eternal and unconditional love for each of us. Jesus' heart is often depicted with flames, indicating the warmth and passion of God's love for the whole world.

Although tradition often situates the beginning of the devotion in the year 1000, it might be more accurate to place its birth during the time of the great mystics, St. Anselm and St. Bernard, between 1050 and 1150. By the Middle Ages, because of a strong emphasis on the passion of our Lord, and due largely to the efforts of St. Bonaventure and St. Gertrude the Great, the devotion became popularized as a means of worshipping the mystery of Christ living in the Church.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart was promoted by several other saints, including St. Albert the Great, St.

Catherine of Siena, and St. Francis de Sales, as well as by influential religious orders, including the Benedictines, the Dominicans, and the Carthusians. However, the saint who is most often associated with this devotion is a French Visitation nun, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–1690). Her private revelations promoted the practice of offering reparation for the outrages committed against the Blessed Sacrament. Saint Alphonsus Liguori, founder of the Redemptorists, was influenced by St. Margaret Mary in his devotion to the Sacred Heart.



1856—Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Established

Almost 200 years after St. Margaret Mary Alacoque's revelations, Venerable Pope Pius IX established the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to be observed on the Friday after Corpus Christi.

1899—Christ's Universal Love

In anticipation of the Holy Year ushering in the new century, Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Annum Sacrum*, consecrating the entire world

to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, declaring the Sacred Heart a symbol of Christ's boundless love and a source of grace and mercy for humanity.

1928—Reparation for the Sins of Humanity

St. Pius XI issued his encyclical on reparation to the Sacred Heart, *Miserentissimus Redemptor*, stressing the need for the faithful to make reparation for the sins of humanity, which deeply wound the heart of Christ.

1956—Application to the Modern World

Pope Pius XII published his encyclical *Haurietis Aquas*, a reflection exploring the theological and scriptural foundations of this devotion.

1999—Needs of the New Millennium

On the 100th anniversary of Pope Leo's consecration of the world to the Sacred Heart, Pope St. John Paul II issued a letter, in which he wrote, "The man of the year 2000 needs Christ's heart to know God and to know himself; he needs it to build the civilization of love."

2024—*Dilexit Nos* (He Loved Us)

On October 24, 2024, Pope Francis issued this encyclical. Weaving together elements of the traditional devotion with issues of today's world, he writes, "What kind of worship would we give to Christ if we were to rest content with an individual relationship with him and show no interest in relieving the sufferings of others?" (DN 205)

Who Can Benefit From This Devotion?

Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque encouraged this devotion for everyone: "As to persons living in the world, they shall find in this devotion all the aids necessary in their state of life: peace in their homes, consolation in their work, the blessing of heaven upon all their enterprises, comfort in their sorrows, a secure refuge during life and especially at the hours of death. It is plainly evident that there is no one in the world who will not receive all kinds of heavenly blessings if they have a true love of Jesus Christ manifested by a devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus."

Novena Meditations to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

FOR A WORLD THAT HAS LOST HEART

FIRST MEDITATION

The Gentle Heart of Jesus

[Jesus said,] "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves."

MATTHEW 11:29



We live in a world that is often unkind, given to uncivil speech, harsh judgments, and intolerance of opinions other than our own.

Gentle Jesus, so that I may resist the temptation to disregard others, and I may remember to be gentle in my speech, kind in my actions, and generous in my judgments, please make my heart like yours. Amen.

SECOND MEDITATION

The Loving Heart of Jesus

[Jesus said,] "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

JOHN 15:12-13



So often we think of "love" as a feeling, not as something we do. Sometimes we are called to commit to loving behavior even when the feeling isn't there.

Loving Jesus, so that I may love others as you love me, please make my heart like yours. Amen.

The heart of Christ, in its sacredness and purity, symbolizes the place from which emanates God's eternal and unconditional love for each of us.

THIRD MEDITATION

The Heart of Jesus That Desires Our Love

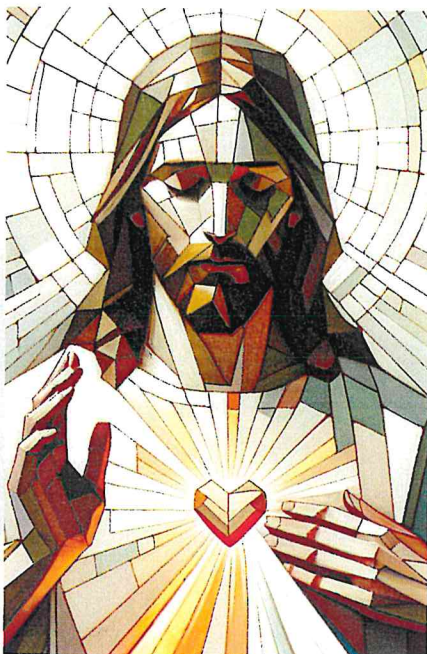
[Jesus told the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, then said,] "Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

MATTHEW 25:37-40



There are so many in need: refugees, mothers and fathers desperate to care for their children, the poor without adequate food or medical care, children without access to education or a safe place to sleep, elders isolated and lonely. Our Lord showed us how to love him—by caring for the most vulnerable among us.

Jesus of the poor, open my eyes to see you in every person on my path, and so that I am not afraid to generously love them, please make my heart like yours. Amen.



FOURTH MEDITATION

The Sorrowful Heart of Jesus

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me."

MATTHEW 26:36-38



The unjust suffering in this world is too much to bear—wars, violence, poverty, abuse. Each injustice is a crime against goodness, against what God created this world to be, and pierces the heart of Jesus and all who follow him.

Suffering Jesus, comfort those who need your presence, and so that I may do my little part to ease the suffering in this world, please make my heart like yours. Amen.

FIFTH MEDITATION

The Compassionate Heart of Jesus

[Jesus, telling the Parable of the Prodigal Son, said,] "While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him."

LUKE 15:20



When those we love wander from the Way, leave the Church, or behave in ways that hurt themselves or others, we may be tempted to despair. Remember that the arms of Jesus are always open, as ours should also be.

Compassionate Jesus, forgive me when I have been selfish, harsh, or judgmental, and so that I may forgive others as you forgive me, please make my heart like yours. Amen.

SIXTH MEDITATION**The Generous Heart of Jesus**

[Jesus said,] “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.”

MATTHEW 5:43–44



Loving those who have hurt us or who have hurt someone we love may seem impossible. Yet, Jesus taught that we should love even our enemies; he does not mention any exceptions.

Generous Jesus, so that I may believe that it is possible to do the impossible, that even I can love someone I find unlovable, please make my heart like yours. Amen.

SEVENTH MEDITATION**The Grateful Heart of Jesus**

In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:18



So many blessings we fail to notice! If we did notice them, we would say nothing but “thank you!” Gratitude is important, not only because we will be happier but also because gratitude is the foundation of generosity. And this world needs more generous souls who care.

Generous and grateful Jesus, I am so blessed, yet I ask for one thing more: please make my heart like yours. Amen.

EIGHTH MEDITATION**The Ignored and Despised Heart of Jesus**

When the sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him?... And they took offense at him.... [Jesus] was amazed at their lack of faith.

MARK 6:2–3, 6



Some people despise Jesus. Many more people despise his teachings. If we say we love Jesus but ignore his gospel, this does great harm. Claiming to love and follow Jesus without acting like him turns people away from the light.

Steadfast Jesus, rejected by many, so that I may have the courage to humbly follow you and witness to your love for every person, please make my heart like yours. Amen.

NINTH MEDITATION**The Faithful Heart of Jesus**

[Jesus said to his disciples,] “I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:20



Jesus promised to be with us always: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20). We need only to believe and come together with others who believe. Praying alone with Jesus is good. Praying with others supports our private prayers. We are made for community.

Faithful Jesus, so that I may see your face in everyone I meet and recognize every person as a brother or sister, give me the grace of a faithful heart like yours. Amen.



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CLOSING PRAYER

Loving Jesus,
as your heart speaks to mine,
may it speak to the world the message
that everyone is loved,
everyone is valued,
everyone is embraced
in the arms of God the Creator.
Jesus, receive my heart today.
Soften it where it is hard,
open it to whom it is closed,
and so that I may be
kind, loving, faithful, and strong,
please make my heart like yours.
Amen.

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