



Sacred Heart of Jesus

No matter what the cost, let us remain united with our superiors through obedience and united among ourselves by the bonds of that love of which the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the burning center, and which, so to speak, should form a chain linking together all the members of Holy Cross. This, moreover, is the recommendation of our Divine Lord to His apostles. It was the object of His touching prayer to His heavenly Father for us when He said: "Holy Father, I pray that they may be one, in the unity of one spirit, one faith and one love, and that just as Thou art in me and I in Thee, so also they may be one in us.

—Basil Moreau

Every summer, we in Holy Cross gather to celebrate jubilees of our brothers who are marking twenty-five, forty, fifty, and even more years of vowed life or priestly ministry. These powerful occasions of reminiscing and rejoicing—the joys and sorrows, the achievements and trials, the grace and the sin—invite us to rekindle the dreams of our youth and our hopes to make a difference. For us in Holy Cross, they are dreams and hopes inflamed with the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Fr. Moreau chose the feast of the Sacred Heart as the patronal feast of the priests of Holy Cross precisely because of the powerful image of Jesus' human heart aflame with love for all sinners. We ground our model of priestly love in the Sacred Heart of Jesus—that heart pierced by the soldier's lance in the final proof that Jesus offered all, every last bit of his life substance, for us. His open heart is a burning center from which flows life-giving blood and water, hope for the world that we strive to embody.

To love in this same way—unreservedly and sacrificially, creatively and redemptively—is a challenge for us each day and draws us into a whole new priestly identity. For those of us who are ordained priests, the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus holds up for us a model of the complete and unconditional love that must be the heart of our ministry of bringing Christ into the world. Yet we are all a priestly people, anointed as priest, prophet, and king in our baptism. There is no room for any of us to hold back, to hesitate, to shrink away in fear. There is no place for self-absorption or self-protection, no way to hide from the costs of such incredible love, no way to make this love self-serving. It must be the total gift of self.

Jesus' compassionate and merciful love, a fully human love, leads to and builds unity among people. There is room for everyone in the Sacred Heart of Jesus—every sinner and every saint. In his heart the sinner finds forgiveness; the saint finds glory. The sinner is led to conversion; those striving for the perfection of holiness learn the lesson of self-giving. Both in conversion and in self-gift, our hearts will be broken and pierced. But from a broken, contrite heart flows a steadfast spirit and an enduring love.

Jesus indeed brought to the world a truly impossible love. He wanted us to love each other with the same love he experienced in the Divine Trinity, a love that unites all as one. And so our own love must be much more than any natural love of kinship or friends. This love, manifested for religious in obedience to community and for all people in their regard and care for their neighbors, can be costly. It underscores that a total gift of self is precisely a total gift of self for the sake of others. But Love himself draws us from independence and self-sufficiency to interdependence. Inflamed by the Sacred Heart, we live and love, beyond our own capabilities; we become convincing signs that our ultimate destiny is union with one another in Christ.

Wherever two or three are gathered together—in families and in religious communities, with kin and with stranger—there we will find Jesus in our midst, inspiring us all to be imitations of his Sacred Heart—living witnesses of love's unifying power.

Bob Epping, C.S.C.