

Closing of 40 Hours
Sacred Heart of Jesus
14 October 2008

I told you on Sunday that I had a funny story to share with you about the statues our family had of the Sacred Heart and of Mary – well, here they are. When we were kids, my brother and I shared a room – and on each side of the room was a small alcove where we had a desk and some shelves – and on top of each of the shelves was one of these statues.

For a period of time, my paternal grandmother lived with us – she was always lots of fun in our home – she loved to play cards and everyday at 5 o'clock you could hear her start saying, "What does a girl have to do to get a drink around this joint?!" My grandmother, Beba – as we called her, is the one who lead me into a college career working with the elderly in a nursing home – she loved life and lived it well.

But she had one major obstacle in her life – she was only 4 foot 6. She was a TINY woman – she used to shop for her size 4 high-heeled shoes in the children's department – her feet were too tiny to buy regular woman's shoes. Well, one day, while my parents were away and Beba, my grandmother, was watching my brother and myself, my brother, Chuck, decided that he wanted one of the books on the top of his bookshelf. His shelf had this statue of the Sacred Heart on it. Beba tried and tried to reach the book he wanted – but, being so short, the book was just out of her reach. Finally she managed to touch the spine of the book – and I guess she decided that if she could just bump it or hit it, it would fall down and she could give it to Chuck. What she didn't notice, however, was this statue of the Sacred Heart, sitting there at the edge of the shelf. As she pushed and hit the book, hoping it would fall, she didn't see that, with every nudge, the statue was moving closer and closer to the edge of the shelf – until it finally came CRASHING down – right on her head! This thing ain't light! And she's a tiny woman. My grandmother fell to the floor as this statue of the Sacred Heart fell and hit her right in the head. I thought for sure that my brother had killed my grandmother. After a few moments, she got up – holding her head – and saying, "Jesus came down upon me – and boy did it hurt!"

You know, that's what we all want! Not for this statue to fall on our heads – but for Jesus to come down upon us – to fill us with His life and love – to give us His mercy and compassion – to free us from all fear and anxiety. We WANT Jesus to come down upon us – why doesn't he?!! Perhaps it's not because he doesn't want to – but we haven't done something to "knock Him down" – like my grandmother had.

This weekend at Masses – and again tonight, we're going to do what we can to have Jesus "come down upon us" – as we again consecrate ourselves and our families and our homes and our parish to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In the Gospel we heard tonight, Jesus asked Peter, “do you love me? Yes, Lord – you know that I love you.” Certainly Jesus knows everything. How does someone know that we love them? How do we know that someone loves us?

Often, when counseling people in confession, I remind them that if we love someone, we do anything they ask of us. In fact, when we love someone, we will go to great lengths, we will go out of our way to respond to their needs, to their desires. To love someone, much more than an emotion or a feeling – it’s a decision. We decide to love someone, and once we decide that – our actions follow.

Peter, over the course of his life, decided to follow Christ – decided to love Him. Even when he made mistakes, when he sinned in denying Christ, when he thought with a human mind – without understanding God’s mind – he always came back to the Lord – his decision to love and follow Christ always prevailed. We, over the course of our lives, have been led closer and closer to Christ – first by our parents who brought us to Christ initially in the Sacrament of Baptism. Then, later in life, we ourselves *chose* to follow Christ by being Confirmed. We decided, on our own, to be one of Christ’s followers. We decided to love him. And now, during our parish’s 40 Hours and during this Enthronement weekend – we have decided to dedicate ourselves, our homes and our families, to Jesus’ Sacred Heart.

But, in our spiritual lives, as we grow in our faith, we want always to be growing in that love of God – that love of Jesus Christ – we want to grow in the love of Jesus’ Sacred Heart, and Its presence here in this Eucharist. How do we grow in this love?

Our enthronement of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in our homes offers many ways to grow in our love of God.

In 1671, Margaret Mary Alcoque entered the convent in Paray, France. It was there that the Lord appeared to her – as we have depicted in this window (unfortunately now dark) and in the mural above the main altar. This is how St. Margaret Mary explained her vision of the Sacred Heart:

"On the feast of St. John the Evangelist, having received from my divine Savior a favor almost similar to that which this Beloved Disciple received on the evening of the Last Supper, the divine Heart was represented to me as a throne all of fire with flames radiating its light on every side. It appeared more brilliant than the sun, and transparent like crystal. The wound which He received on the Cross appeared clearly. There was a crown of thorns around the Sacred Heart and It was surmounted by a cross. My divine Savior gave me to understand that these instruments of His Passion signified that the immense love which He had for men was the cause of all the sufferings and all the humiliations which He willed to suffer for us; that from the first moment of His Incarnation, all these torments and all this contempt were present to Him, and that it was at this first moment that the Cross, was, so to speak, planted in His Sacred Heart, which then, in testimony of Its love

for us, accepted all the humiliations, poverty and sorrows which His sacred Humanity was to suffer during the whole course of His mortal life; and in addition, It accepted the outrages to which His love was to expose Him to the end of the ages on the altar in the most holy and august Sacrament."

"...this amiable Heart was presented to me with these words: 'I have an ardent thirst to be honored and loved by men in the Most Blessed Sacrament, and I find hardly anyone who endeavors according to My wish to quench this thirst by making me some return of love.'

The core of this message to St. Margaret Mary is how MUCH Christ's heart BURNS out of love for us! And how much he WANTS us to love Him in return. That's the center and the core of our devotion to the Sacred Heart – to RETURN God's love!

During the apparitions of the Sacred Heart to St. Margaret Mary, Jesus made a number of promises for anyone who would revere and honor and dedicate themselves to returning the Love of His Sacred Heart – some of them are that:

- they would have all the graces they need to live their lives – to endure their trials – to persevere in their vocations
- they would have peace in their families
- they would be consoled in all their troubles.
- Their work would be blessed
- Their tepid souls would become fervent – and those whose souls were already fervent would rise to even greater perfection
- Priests would be able to soften even the hardest of hearts – making them fertile ground for the Gospel

Don't we all desire these things in our own lives?! Don't we WISH for peace in our homes, for a fervent faith, for strength in our daily work and consolation in all our sufferings? Jesus OFFERS us all of this – now, all we have to do is “knock Him off the shelf” – and dedicate our lives to Him – and He will shower his grace down upon us. This is why we enshrine the Sacred Heart in our homes – and gather our families around to pray and consecrate ourselves to His Sacred Heart – because He promised that those who return His love will be richly blessed in this life AND in the next.

The ENTHRONEMENT of the Sacred Heart means the Official and Social recognition of the loving Kingship of the Heart of Jesus in the Christian family. The family shows this recognition by giving the image of the Sacred Heart a place of honor in the home and dedicating itself to Him by an act of consecration. In this way the family is brought under the benign influence of the Divine Heart, which asserts itself in all the events of family life.

The Enthronement is like a recognition of the living presence of Our Lord in the home, where His Divine Heart, as King of Love, is the Center, attracting all the members of the family. It is more than a mere veneration of the image of the Sacred Heart or a transient consecration. It is a "way of life," a permanent state of devotedness and love, full of grace and joy.

The Enthronement is likewise a complete realization of all the desires of the Sacred Heart revealed to Saint Margaret Mary. Enthroned in a family that is totally filled with Divine charity, Jesus lives with its members as with His very own, directing and super-naturalizing their intimate home life. The home becomes His sanctuary. He is its King and Friend, reigning over it by love, receiving ardent love and tender reparation from His devoted subjects, bestowing in return untold graces, and filling each heart with peace and happiness.

The keynote of the Enthronement is Our Lord's desire to reign over us all as the King of Love. Jesus desires to reign by love and to communicate this love, as He did at Nazareth and Bethany. At Nazareth He was the King of Love in His own home; at Bethany He reigned as King of Love in a devoted family, the prototype of all Christian families of later ages, over which He desires to rule supreme as King of Love and Mercy. By the Enthronement and a subsequent life of devotedness, the family recognizes and proclaims in a special way this Kingship of Jesus Christ, so utterly ignored by the world.

However, as I already hinted, this is not merely an exterior sign, beautiful though it be. The Enthronement must not be a mere external formality, a pious momentary impulse. No, it is and must remain a serious act, performed after mature reflection, by virtue of which Our Lord Jesus Christ is willingly and lovingly acknowledged as the true Head and Ruler of the family.

The Act of Consecration itself may be looked upon as a transitory act. But the Enthronement is a fixed condition, a state, by virtue of which the spirit of the holy Gospel becomes the guide, the rule and the soul of the home where the Sacred Heart of Jesus reigns supreme.

Jesus must be invited to participate in all family affairs; He must be asked to sanctify all the details of the home life by His blessed presence. He must really preside everywhere; everything must be done "beneath His eye" and according to His desires. With Him the family shares its joys and sorrows, good time & bad time, and in sharing them, gives Him glory and deepens the joy or lessens the pain that life inevitably brings.

Living nobly as Jesus desires is the real proof of our love for Him, To remain unchanged in our love for God, whether the light of His smile surrounds us or the shadow of His hand lies heavy upon us, is friendship. It is this friendship that is brought about by the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the home, when it is lived as it is intended to be lived. By the Enthronement and under the influence of the Sacred Heart, each member of the family learns intimacy with Jesus. In all the events of life, the individual as well as the family as a group turns with confidence and love to Jesus and each makes his own life one with Christ's.

The family is the foundation, the nucleus of human society. Just as a plant is composed of cells, so human society is composed of the cells of families, and the healthier the cells, the better the plant thrives. In the heart of the family, the human being receives its existence, its

life of body and soul. There the first training and education are imparted to the child; there the character is formed, the ideals shaped and molded.

The condition of the family establishes the condition of the parish, of the state, of the country and of the whole Church. If each family is truly Christian, the entire parish will be so; likewise, with the diocese, our town and our country. What then can be of greater importance for the Church (and the world) than the sanctification of the family?

A Christian family without love for Christ, without the protection of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, is in danger of being corrupted by the spirit of worldliness, whose lures stifle all devotion and fear of God. The imperative condition, then, for extending the reign of Christ over us all is the restoration of families in Christ.

The Enthronement, ordained by Divine Providence and highly recommended by the Popes, is a powerful means to preserve and sanctify the family. It is a most efficacious means for the Christian education of children. It enkindles love for the Sacred Heart in the members of the family and encourages frequent and devout attendance at Mass and reception of Holy Communion. It is a strong defense against the seductive influences and teachings of the modern corrupted world. It brings about, as a logical sequence, a marked increase in vocations. For all these reasons, the solemn Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in families ranks as a work of the greatest consequence.

WHAT A LOSS IT IS FOR CATHOLICS TO NEGLECT A MEANS SO EASY AND AT THE SAME TIME SO POWERFUL, OF BEING HAPPY, OF BECOMING SAINTS.

The intimate and inseparable bond between the Enthronement and the Eucharistic life, which we celebrate during these Eucharistic Devotions, has always been stressed. This has always been the keystone of the work of the Enthronement, the secret of its fruitfulness, the mark of its success.

As our parish family of the Sacred Heart of Jesus concludes tonight its Annual Eucharistic Devotions, I pray that every family in our parish will truly be devoted to His Most Sacred Heart. May we all enthrone Christ in our hearts, in our homes and in our families. May we come here to the altar to be fed and nourished by His most Sacred Body and Blood – and may our love for Christ be revealed in the way we live, the way we act, by what we say and by what we do.

“Simon, do you love me?” John, do you love me? Marie, do you love me? Bob, do you love me? Jesus is asking you!!!! “Do you love me?” How else can we respond but, “Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.”

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be praised, adored and loved, with grateful affection, at every moment, in all of our homes and in all the tabernacles of the world – even to the end of time.
Amen.