

Annum Sacram (On Consecration to the Sacred Heart)

Pope Leo XIII

To the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, and Bishops of the Catholic World in Grace and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Venerable Brethren, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

1. But a short time ago, as you well know, We, by letters apostolic, and following the custom and ordinances of Our predecessors, commanded the celebration in this city, at no distant date, of a Holy Year. And now today, in the hope and with the object that this religious celebration shall be more devoutly performed, We have traced and recommended a striking design from which, if all shall follow it out with hearty good will, We not unreasonably expect extraordinary and lasting benefits for Christendom in the first place and also for the whole human race.

2. Already more than once We have endeavoured, after the example of Our predecessors Innocent XII, Benedict XIII, Clement XIII, Pius VI, and Pius IX, devoutly to foster and bring out into fuller light that most excellent form of devotion which has for its object the veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; this We did especially by the Decree given on June 28, 1889, by which We raised the Feast under that name to the dignity of the first class. But now We have in mind a more signal form of devotion which shall be in a manner the crowning perfection of all the honours that people have been accustomed to pay to the Sacred Heart, and which We confidently trust will be most pleasing to Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. This is not the first time, however, that the design of which We speak has been mooted. Twenty-five years ago, on the approach of the solemnities of the second centenary of the Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque's reception of the Divine command to propagate the worship of the Sacred Heart, many letters from all parts, not merely from private persons but from Bishops also were sent to Pius IX begging that he would consent to consecrate the whole human race to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. It was thought best at the time to postpone the matter in order that a well-considered decision might be arrived at. Meanwhile permission was granted to individual cities which desired it thus to consecrate themselves, and a form of consecration was drawn up. Now, for certain new and additional reasons, We consider that the plan is ripe for fulfilment.

3. This world-wide and solemn testimony of allegiance and piety is especially appropriate to Jesus Christ, who is the Head and Supreme Lord of the race. His empire extends not only over Catholic nations and those who, having been duly washed in the waters of holy baptism, belong of right to the Church, although erroneous opinions keep them astray, or dissent from her teaching cuts them off from her care; it comprises also all those who are deprived of the Christian faith, so that the whole human race is most truly under the power of Jesus Christ. For He who is the Only-begotten Son of God the Father, having

the same substance with Him and being the brightness of His glory and the figure of His substance (Hebrews i., 3) necessarily has everything in common with the Father, and therefore sovereign power over all things. This is why the Son of God thus speaks of Himself through the Prophet: "But I am appointed king by him over Sion, his holy mountain. . . The Lord said to me, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me and I will give thee the Gentiles for thy inheritance and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession" (Psalm, ii.). By these words He declares that He has power from God over the whole Church, which is signified by Mount Sion, and also over the rest of the world to its uttermost ends. On what foundation this sovereign power rests is made sufficiently plain by the words, "Thou art My Son." For by the very fact that He is the Son of the King of all, He is also the heir of all His Father's power: hence the words - "I will give thee the Gentiles for thy inheritance," which are similar to those used by Paul the Apostle, "whom he hath appointed heir of all things" (Hebrews i., 2).

4. But we should now give most special consideration to the declarations made by Jesus Christ, not through the Apostles or the Prophets but by His own words. To the Roman Governor who asked Him, "Art thou a king then?" He answered unhesitatingly, "Thou sayest that I am a king" (John xviii. 37). And the greatness of this power and the boundlessness of His kingdom is still more clearly declared in these words to the Apostles: "All power is given to me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew xxviii., 18). If then all power has been given to Christ it follows of necessity that His empire must be supreme, absolute and independent of the will of any other, so that none is either equal or like unto it: and since it has been given in heaven and on earth it ought to have heaven and earth obedient to it. And verily he has acted on this extraordinary and peculiar right when He commanded His Apostles to preach His doctrine over the earth, to gather all men together into the one body of the Church by the baptism of salvation, and to bind them by laws, which no one could reject without risking his eternal salvation.

5. But this is not all. Christ reigns not only by natural right as the Son of God, but also by a right that He has acquired. For He it was who snatched us "from the power of darkness" (Colossians i., 13), and "gave Himself for the redemption of all" (I Timothy ii., 6). Therefore not only Catholics, and those who have duly received Christian baptism, but also all men, individually and collectively, have become to Him "a purchased people" (I Peter ii., 9). St. Augustine's words are therefore to the point when he says: "You ask what price He paid? See what He gave and you will understand how much He paid. The price was the blood of Christ. What could cost so much but the whole world, and all its people? The great price He paid was paid for all" (T. 120 on St. John).

6. How it comes about that infidels themselves are subject to the power and dominion of Jesus Christ is clearly shown by St. Thomas, who gives us the reason and its explanation. For having put the question whether His judicial power extends to all men, and having stated that judicial authority flows naturally from royal authority, he concludes decisively as follows: "All things are subject to Christ as far as His power is concerned, although

they are not all subject to Him in the exercise of that power" (3a., p., q. 59, a. 4). This sovereign power of Christ over men is exercised by truth, justice, and above all, by charity.

7. To this twofold ground of His power and domination He graciously allows us, if we think fit, to add voluntary consecration. Jesus Christ, our God and our Redeemer, is rich in the fullest and perfect possession of all things: we, on the other hand, are so poor and needy that we have nothing of our own to offer Him as a gift. But yet, in His infinite goodness and love, He in no way objects to our giving and consecrating to Him what is already His, as if it were really our own; nay, far from refusing such an offering, He positively desires it and asks for it: "My son, give me thy heart." We are, therefore, able to be pleasing to Him by the good will and the affection of our soul. For by consecrating ourselves to Him we not only declare our open and free acknowledgment and acceptance of His authority over us, but we also testify that if what we offer as a gift were really our own, we would still offer it with our whole heart. We also beg of Him that He would vouchsafe to receive it from us, though clearly His own. Such is the efficacy of the act of which We speak, such is the meaning underlying Our words.

8. And since there is in the Sacred Heart a symbol and a sensible image of the infinite love of Jesus Christ which moves us to love one another, therefore is it fit and proper that we should consecrate ourselves to His most Sacred Heart - an act which is nothing else than an offering and a binding of oneself to Jesus Christ, seeing that whatever honour, veneration and love is given to this divine Heart is really and truly given to Christ Himself.

9. For these reasons We urge and exhort all who know and love this divine Heart willingly to undertake this act of piety; and it is Our earnest desire that all should make it on the same day, that so the aspirations of so many thousands who are performing this act of consecration may be borne to the temple of heaven on the same day. But shall We allow to slip from Our remembrance those innumerable others upon whom the light of Christian truth has not yet shined? We hold the place of Him who came to save that which was lost, and who shed His blood for the salvation of the whole human race. And so We greatly desire to bring to the true life those who sit in the shadow of death. As we have already sent messengers of Christ over the earth to instruct them, so now, in pity for their lot with all Our soul we commend them, and as far as in us lies We consecrate them to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In this way this act of devotion, which We recommend, will be a blessing to all. For having performed it, those in whose hearts are the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ will feel that faith and love increased. Those who knowing Christ, yet neglect His law and its precepts, may still gain from His Sacred Heart the flame of charity. And lastly, for those still more unfortunate, who are struggling in the darkness of superstition, we shall all with one mind implore the assistance of heaven that Jesus Christ, to whose power they are subject, may also one day render them submissive to its exercise; and that not only in the life to come when He will fulfil His will upon all men, by saving some and punishing others, (St. Thomas, *ibid*), but also in this mortal life by giving

them faith and holiness. May they by these virtues strive to honour God as they ought, and to win everlasting happiness in heaven.

10. Such an act of consecration, since it can establish or draw tighter the bonds which naturally connect public affairs with God, gives to States a hope of better things. In these latter times especially, a policy has been followed which has resulted in a sort of wall being raised between the Church and civil society. In the constitution and administration of States the authority of sacred and divine law is utterly disregarded, with a view to the exclusion of religion from having any constant part in public life. This policy almost tends to the removal of the Christian faith from our midst, and, if that were possible, of the banishment of God Himself from the earth. When men's minds are raised to such a height of insolent pride, what wonder is it that the greater part of the human race should have fallen into such disquiet of mind and be buffeted by waves so rough that no one is suffered to be free from anxiety and peril? When religion is once discarded it follows of necessity that the surest foundations of the public welfare must give way, whilst God, to inflict on His enemies the punishment they so richly deserve, has left them the prey of their own evil desires, so that they give themselves up to their passions and finally wear themselves out by excess of liberty.

11. Hence that abundance of evils which have now for a long time settled upon the world, and which pressingly call upon us to seek for help from Him by whose strength alone they can be driven away. Who can He be but Jesus Christ the Only-begotten Son of God? "For there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv., 12). We must have recourse to Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We have gone astray and we must return to the right path: darkness has overshadowed our minds, and the gloom must be dispelled by the light of truth: death has seized upon us, and we must lay hold of life. It will at length be possible that our many wounds be healed and all justice spring forth again with the hope of restored authority; that the splendours of peace be renewed, and swords and arms drop from the hand when all men shall acknowledge the empire of Christ and willingly obey His word, and "Every tongue shall confess that our Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father" (Philippians ii, 11).

12. When the Church, in the days immediately succeeding her institution, was oppressed beneath the yoke of the Caesars, a young Emperor saw in the heavens a cross, which became at once the happy omen and cause of the glorious victory that soon followed. And now, today, behold another blessed and heavenly token is offered to our sight – the most Sacred Heart of Jesus, with a cross rising from it and shining forth with dazzling splendour amidst flames of love. In that Sacred Heart all our hopes should be placed, and from it the salvation of men is to be confidently besought.

13. Finally, there is one motive which We are unwilling to pass over in silence, personal to Ourselves it is true, but still good and weighty, which moves Us to undertake this

celebration. God, the author of every good, not long ago preserved Our life by curing Us of a dangerous disease. We now wish, by this increase of the honour paid to the Sacred Heart, that the memory of this great mercy should be brought prominently forward, and Our gratitude be publicly acknowledged.

14. For these reasons, We ordain that on the ninth, tenth and eleventh of the coming month of June, in the principal church of every town and village, certain prayers be said, and on each of these days there be added to the other prayers the Litany of the Sacred Heart approved by Our authority. On the last day the form of consecration shall be recited which, Venerable Brethren, We sent to you with these letters.

15. As a pledge of divine benefits, and in token of Our paternal benevolence, to you, and to the clergy and people committed to your care We lovingly grant in the Lord the Apostolic Benediction.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's on the 25th day of May 1899, the twenty-second year of Our Pontificate.