

FROM YOUR DIOCESE

JUNE 2024

FROM BISHOP RICHARD G. HENNING

GOD IS LOVE

Each year in June, the Church observes the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. The devotion was originally proposed by Fr. John Eudes in the 1600's and spread far and wide through the witness of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque.

The devotion is founded upon the biblical truth that God is Love. Notice that the holy scriptures go beyond saying that God loves to proclaim that God is in Himself a communion of love. This is part of the same mystery that we celebrated last week on Trinity Sunday.

The Sacred Heart devotion also personalizes this truth. Our Lord is the revelation of the Heart of God. Miraculously, the only begotten Son has loved us with a heart of flesh – a heart wounded to deliver us from sin and death.

The artistic expressions of the Sacred Heart draw upon the biblical language and imagery. Sometimes they are images of Jesus pointing to his radiant and wounded heart. At other times the image is of the Sacred Heart itself accompanied by imagery of the passion such as the crown of thorns. There is a particularly beautiful work of art of this kind in the sanctuary of St. Patrick's Church on Smith Hill. The images are actually a part of the devotion as the Church encouraged the faithful to put such images in their homes and workplaces.

The other two major components of the devotion are the novena prayers and the First Friday devotions. All of these prayers invoke the loving mercy of the Divine Savior. The devotions are a beautiful way to seek particular petitions, to pray for others, and to implore that mercy when we have offended the Lord's most beautiful, gracious and loving heart. Sometimes the offenses are our own and sometimes we seek to do reparation for the sins of the world.

I remind us of these gifts of the Lord in part because of the approaching feast, but I also wish to express some specific ways in which the novena, feast, and devotions might help our own particular circumstances. During the month of June, there are many young people celebrating milestones and graduating from school. This devotion is a beautiful way to give a spiritual gift by praying for them by name or even thinking of particular intentions or graces that might aid them in their lives. The young have so many challenges and too much sadness in our culture and I believe that we should support and encourage them in every way possible – including our prayers.

I also encourage us to consider the mercy of God and the value of reparation for sin. Certainly we would personally benefit from the humble admission of our faults, the grace of a good confession, and a profound trust in the loving mercy of the Lord.

We may also wish to consider the need for God's mercy for our world where violence, exploitation and selfishness abound. In

April, I wrote to you about the suffering of survivors of sexual abuse. I pray the Sacred Heart Novena for their healing and to ask the Lord to cleanse the Church and the world of that terrible sin and to renew and heal survivors.

There is also the sad fact that since 2020 some 300 Catholic Churches have been vandalized in the United States. Many of those attacks involved damage to images of Our Lady or Our Lord. Most tragically there have been some instances of the desecration of the Blessed Sacrament. These offenses along with the wider contempt for faith and the frequent crude mockery of the faith and of the Lord require us to do spiritual reparation and hope in that Divine Love that radiates from the Sacred Heart.

Perhaps you already pray these devotion regularly. Maybe you remember them from childhood or never had the opportunity to learn them. In whatever circumstances I encourage us to embrace this beautiful feast, its efficacious devotions and the truth of the Lord's healing love. Let this month of June, the month of the Sacred Heart, be our time to proclaim that GOD IS LOVE!



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