



The Solemnity of Corpus Christi with reference to the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus – 11th and 16th June 2023 – Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

“The love of the Lord is everlasting”.

I was very fortunate to have been asked to spend some years at Maryvale, which is also called Old Oscott where the Seminary Oscott College was founded in 1794. It is a place with a wonderful Catholic history that takes us back to the 10th Century and ‘Oscote’ Chapel. However, it is in relation to the first public Chapel of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in England that I reflect on it today: this was created there, in what was then Oscott College by Bishop Milner of the Midland District in 1814. It was there that the first priests of the Seminary were nurtured in their love of the Eucharist. When the College moved to its present site in 1838 St John Henry Newman went to live there for a time and founded the Oratory there. He gave the building its present name St Mary in the Valley, Maryvale. Cardinal Newman’s ‘Meditations and Devotions’ was first published in 1893, three years after his death. In a section, Meditations on Christian Doctrine, he had a chapter on the Sacred Heart and there he wrote:

“O most Sacred, most loving Heart of Jesus, Thou art concealed in the Holy Eucharist, and Thou beatest for us still”.

In these words Newman draws together succinctly the two great Feasts we celebrate in the month of June each year.

Hanael Bianchi in Catholic Review [2021] reminds us that St Margaret Mary who was born in 1647 in Burgundy, in France, was the one who popularised devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a devotion which is as old as Christianity itself. From an early age she was drawn to the Blessed Sacrament and prayer, especially because of her health issues and her family living in poverty. She joined the Visitation Sisters at the age of 23. Jesus appeared to her in December 1673 and the visions continued for 18 months; the message that Jesus gave her formed the basis of Sacred Heart Devotion.

To begin with her Community and Confessors thought she was delusional, but it was when the Jesuit, St Claude de la Colombière became her Confessor and judged her visions of Jesus to be authentic that the situation changed. He helped spread the message.

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The Sacred Heart of Jesus symbolises His great love for humanity. Jesus initiated this devotion due to his great love for us. He told St Margaret Mary: *“My divine heart is so inflamed with love for men, and for you in particular that, being unable any longer to contain within itself the flames of its burning love, it needs to spread them abroad through you, and manifest itself to them (mankind) in order to enrich them with the precious graces of sanctification and salvation necessary to withdraw them from the abyss of perdition”*.

The love of Jesus for us is in the Eucharist. Sacred Heart devotion is therefore linked to the Eucharist. Jesus asked for devotees of the Sacred Heart to mark a Holy Hour on Thursday night, commemorating the time Jesus spent in the Garden of Gethsemane and when He asked His closest apostles to stay with Him. He also asked for there to a Feast of the Sacred Heart on the Friday after Corpus Christi. The message of St Margaret Mary has a focus on reparation; Jesus asked Margaret Mary to make reparation for all those who mistreat Him in the Eucharist: *“Behold the heart that has so loved men that it has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming itself, in order to testify its love”*. The Feast of the Sacred Heart would be an opportunity to make reparation for offences against the Eucharist (Jesus spoke to Margaret Mary of ingratitude, irreverence and sacrilege, and *“coldness to me in this sacrament of love”*).

Lastly, He requested that individuals receive Holy Communion on the First Friday of each month. He made generous promises to those who follow this devotion for nine months: *“In the excess of the mercy of my heart, I promise you that my all powerful love will grant to those who will receive communion on the First Fridays, for nine consecutive months, the grace of final repentance: they will not die in my displeasure, not without receiving the sacraments; and my heart will be their secure refuge in that last hour”*.

We live in different times, given the reforms to the Liturgy since the Second Vatican Council, and in particular the frequency of receiving Holy Communion has increased when attending Mass. However, these two Feasts present us with a welcome opportunity to reflect anew on the wonder of Our Lord’s love in the Eucharist, and the importance of our respect for the real presence of Jesus in this Sacrament: it’s easy to become over familiar when we don’t nurture reverence for the ‘very God concealed beneath the veil of the bread of heaven’ as we sing in the popular hymn of St Alphonsus.

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