



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 20 June 1979

1. On the day after tomorrow, Friday next, the liturgy of the Church is concentrated with particular adoration and love *around the mystery of the Heart of Christ*. Today, therefore, anticipating this day and this feast, already, together with you, I wish to turn the eyes of our hearts to the Mystery of that Heart. It has spoken to me ever since my youth. Every year I return to this mystery in the liturgical rhythm of the time of the Church.

It is well-known that the month of June is dedicated particularly to the Divine Heart, to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We express to it our love and our adoration by means of the litany which in the single invocations speaks with particular depth of its theological contents.

I wish, therefore, at least briefly, to stop together with you before this Heart, which the Church, as a community of human hearts, addresses. I wish, at least briefly, to speak of this *mystery, such a human one*, in which *God revealed himself with such simplicity and, at the same time, depth and strength*.

2. Today let the texts of the Friday liturgy speak for us, beginning with the reading of the Gospel according to John. The Evangelist reports a fact with the precision of an eye witness.

"Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath (for that sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water." (Jn 19:31-34).

Not a word about his heart.

The Evangelist speaks only of the piercing of his side with a spear, and the coming out of blood and water. The language of the description is almost medical, anatomical. The soldier's spear certainly penetrated the heart, to make sure that the Condemned Man was already dead. This heart—this human heart—has stopped working. Jesus has ceased to live. At the same time, however, this anatomical opening of Christ's heart after his death—in spite of all the historical "severity" of the text—drives us to think also at the metaphorical level. The heart is not just an organ that conditions the biological vitality of man. The heart is a symbol. *It speaks of the whole inner man.* It speaks of the spiritual interior of man. And tradition at once re-read this meaning of John's description. In a certain sense, moreover, the Evangelist himself gave an inducement to do so when, referring to the attestation of the eye witness that was he himself, he referred, at the same time, to this sentence of Holy Scripture:

·"They shall look on him whom they have pierced." (Jn 19:37; Zc 12:10).

So, actually, does the Church look; so does humanity look. And lo, in the One pierced by the soldier's spear all the generations of Christians have learned and learn to *read the mystery of the Heart* of the Crucified Man who was and is the Son of God.

3. Different is the measure of the knowledge that many disciples, men and women, of the Heart of Christ have acquired of this mystery in the course of the centuries. One of the leading figures in this field was certainly Paul of Tarsus, who, from being a persecutor, was converted and became an Apostle. He, too, speaks to us in the Friday liturgy with the words of the *Letter to the Ephesians*. He speaks as a man who has received a great grace, since it was granted to him "to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" (Eph 3:8-9).

Those "riches of Christ" and at the same time that "eternal plan of salvation" of God are addressed by the Holy Spirit to the "inner man", "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph 3:16-17). And when Christ, with the strength of the Holy Spirit, dwells through faith in our human hearts, then we will be able "to comprehend." with our human spirit (that is, precisely with this "heart") "what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge..." (Eph 3:18-19).

For such knowledge acquired with the heart, *with every human heart*, the Divine Heart of the One who was condemned and crucified on Calvary was opened at the end of his earthly life.

Different is the measure of this knowledge on the part of human hearts. Before the power of Paul's words, let each of us question himself on the measure of his own heart. "... (we shall) reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows every thing." (1 Jn 3:19-20). The Heart of the God-Man does not judge human hearts. The Heart calls. The Heart "invites". That was the purpose for which it was opened with the soldier's

spear.

4. The mystery of the heart opens up through the wounds of the body; the great mystery of piety opens up, the deep feelings of mercy of our God open up (St Bernard, Sermo LXI., 4: *PL* 183, 1072).

Christ speaks in the Friday liturgy: "Learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Mt 11:29).

Only once, perhaps, did the Lord Jesus refer to his own heart, in his own words. And he stressed this sole feature: "gentleness and lowliness": as if he meant that it is only in this way that he wishes to conquer man; that by means of "gentleness and lowliness" he wishes to be the King of hearts. The whole mystery of his reign was expressed. in these words. *Gentleness* and *lowliness* cover, in a certain sense, all the "riches" of the Redeemer's heart, of which St Paul wrote to the Ephesians. But also that "gentleness and lowliness" *reveal him fully*; and enable us to get to know him and accept him; they make him the object of supreme admiration.

The beautiful litany to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is composed of many similar words—more, exclamations of admiration for the riches of the Heart of Christ. Let us meditate on them carefully on that day.

5. Thus, at the end of this fundamental liturgical cycle of the Church—which began with the first Sunday of Advent and passed through the time of Christmas, then of Lent and of the Resurrection up to Pentecost, the Sunday of Holy Trinity, and Corpus Christi—the feast of the Divine Heart, of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, presents itself discreetly. All this cycle is enclosed definitively in it; in the Heart of the Man-God. From it, too, the whole life of the Church irradiates every year.

This *Heart* is "*A source of life and holiness*".

At the conclusion of the audience the Pope spoke to the following groups:

To the diocesan ecclesiastical assistants of Catholic Action Youth:

I now address an affectionate thought to the Diocesan Ecclesiastical Assistants of Catholic Action Youth, who are gathered in Rome for their Meeting in these days. Dear friends, I thank you for your presence, but above all I thank you for your commitment in favour of the young, for their human maturity and for their Christian formation. May the Lord accompany you, enlighten you and sustain you always. Imitate Jesus, Teacher and Friend, for the spiritual and moral salvation of your young people!

To the Missionaries of the Precious Blood and the Adoring Sisters of the Blood of Christ:

I then greet the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, with the Adoring Sisters of the Blood of Christ, who are accompanying a numerous pilgrimage organized on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Canonization of their Founder, San Gaspare del Bufalo.

In the glorious memory of their dedicated Founder, I exhort them to meditate always with generous commitment on the Mystery of the Blood of Christ, shed for the salvation of mankind.

To the young people:

Beloved children and young people! I wish to address a word of special affection to you, who are always numerous and lively.

You have started the summer holidays and you are certainly pleased about it! And I, too, am happy for you and with you!

Enjoy your holidays! But make them also a period of constant and courageous commitment to become better. Let your play, your stay in the mountains or by the seaside, your excursions, your carefree joyfulness, always be united with the resolution to be good, in friendship with Jesus in the Eucharist, as we meditated on the solemnity of "Corpus Christi".

May my prayer and my Blessing accompany you.

To the sick:

And now my greeting is addressed to the dear sick, present at this Audience.

Last Sunday, we celebrated the solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord, of Emmanuel, which means God with us, present under the appearances of the bread and the wine. Christ, immutable in his feelings of tenderness and mercy, as he once did along the roads of Palestine, still today, from the silent but most eloquent presence of the consecrated Host, addresses to the multitudes and in particular to the sick and suffering the consoling words:

"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).

Make this invitation your own. Accept it in your heart, with my Blessing.

To the newlyweds:

My most fervent good wishes for the newly weds, gathered here to see the Pope and receive his Blessing on their newborn home.

To you, too, beloved sons and daughters, who have recently received, through the sacrament of marriage, a treasure of grace entrusted to a frail vessel of clay, I wish to address an encouraging

thought, prompted by the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, recently celebrated.

Jesus in the Eucharist is at your disposal to help you with his presence, to strengthen you with his perennial and ever-renewed mystical sacrifice, to gladden you with his sweet communion. Let your love be pure, generous and faithful, in Jesus in the Eucharist. Let my Blessing accompany you in your generous resolutions.

To the board members of the Committee of Religion and Art of America:

I wish to extend a special welcome to the Board Members of the Committee of Religion and Art of America. I am happy to assure you that like my predecessor Paul VI I too wish to see continued the Church's dialogue of salvation with the artists of the world, and to see faithfully expressed in art that transcendent humanism which reflects a total view of the human person. I am grateful for your generous collaboration in this cause, and I invoke upon you and your families the uplifting blessings of joy and peace.

Appeal for Indo-Chinese Refugees

Urged on by the love of Christ—"Caritas Christi urget nos"—this evening I wish to raise my voice to invite you to turn your minds and hearts to the drama that is taking place in the countries and on the distant seas of South East Asia—a drama that is involving hundreds of thousands of our brothers and sisters. These people are looking for a homeland, because the countries that at first received them have reached the limits of their capacities, while at the same time the offers to accept them permanently in other countries are so far proving insufficient.

For this reason, the plan, to hold an international conference of the countries concerned (and what country could feel uninvolved in this tragedy?) cannot fail to be strongly encouraged. May such a conference be held as quickly as possible! The Holy See hopes that such a meeting will lead the various Governments to make effective arrangements for accepting the refugees from Indo-China, for allowing them transit, and for their permanent settlement.

I express my admiration for the action already undertaken by some countries, as also by international organizations and many private initiatives. But the problem is so great that the weight of it cannot be left for long upon the shoulders of only a few. I appeal to the conscience of humanity, that all should take their share of responsibility, both the peoples and those who govern them, in the name of a solidarity that goes beyond frontiers, races and ideologies.

The community of the Church has already performed a great work of charity and of mutual assistance, and I am very pleased about this. But it can do still more, and I am sure it wishes to. The Pastors in their dioceses will encourage the faithful, and will remind them, in the name of the

Lord, that every man, every woman., every child in need, is our neighbour. Parishes, Catholic organizations, religious communities and also Christian families will find the means of expressing their love for the refugees. Let each one make a personal commitment to make a concrete gesture, as far as individual generosity and love-inspired creativity allows.

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