

**Homily for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
Sacred Heart Church of Saint Katharine Drexel Parish
Springfield, Illinois**

June 7, 2024

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, Deacon and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The month of June in the Catholic Church is dedicated to honoring the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is a time to deepen our devotion to His endless love and mercy. The Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is always celebrated on the Friday after the Second Sunday after Pentecost, which typically occurs in the month of June. This year, the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is celebrated today on June 7, but we will continue throughout the month of June to dedicate ourselves to grow more deeply in our appreciation for the love and mercy that pours forth from Our Lord's Sacred Heart.

There are some segments of our society that would dispute my assertion that the month of June is dedicated to honoring the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Just last month, there were vitriolic reactions to the commencement address given by Harrison Butker, Super Bowl champion

placekicker for the Kansas City Chiefs football team, when he praised Benedictine College as “a thriving beacon of light” where attempts to rebuke and embarrass them for holding fast to Catholic values “wouldn’t be met with anger, but instead met with excitement and pride. Not the deadly sin sort of pride that has an entire month dedicated to it, but the true God-centered pride that is cooperating with the Holy Ghost to glorify him.” That brief passing remark to “pride month” elicited vicious attacks from those who think that June has always been dedicated to the deadly sin of pride, which also celebrates the deadly sin of lust. Lest I be accused of trying to pre-empt their claim to June as “pride month” by saying that June is dedicated to honoring the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I wish to point out that the Catholic Church’s idea of dedicating the month of June to the Sacred Heart of Jesus came long before anyone thought of calling June “pride month.” Proponents of “pride month” trace its roots back to the 1969 Stonewall riots, a violent clash that took place when police raided the Stonewall Tavern, a gay bar in New York City, on June 28, 1969. The first pride marches started the following year, on June 28, 1970. It was not until twenty-five years ago, in 1999, that President Bill Clinton declared June to be “Gay and Lesbian Pride Month.”

The roots of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus can be traced back 2,000 years ago to Our Lord's holy wounds, in particular to the sacred wound when the side of Jesus was pierced by one of the soldiers as Jesus was dying on the cross. The Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were known for their fervent devotion to the Sacred Heart. The devotion was also seen from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries in other religious communities, such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Carthusians, and then also by individual lay Christian. In 1353, Pope Innocent VI instituted a Mass honoring the mystery of the Sacred Heart.

The Office of Readings from the Liturgy of the Hours for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is a reflection on the Sacred Heart by the great Franciscan bishop and theologian, St. Bonaventure, who wrote, "It was a divine decree that permitted one of the soldiers to open his sacred side with a lance. This was done so that the Church might be formed from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death on the cross, and so that the Scripture might be fulfilled: They shall look on him whom they pierced. The blood and water which poured out at that moment were the price of our salvation. Flowing from the secret abyss of our Lord's heart as from a

fountain, this stream gave the sacraments of the Church the power to confer the life of grace, while for those already living in Christ it became a spring of living water welling up to life everlasting.”

Reports of the visions of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque between 1673-1675 brought more widespread devotion to the Sacred Heart. St. Margaret Mary Alacoque was a French nun of the Order of the Visitation of Our Lady. Jesus appeared to her four times in Paray-le-Monial, France, revealing his love for humankind through His Sacred Heart. According to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, Jesus “wanted to bestow upon men during these final centuries such loving redemption in order to snatch them from the control of Satan, whom He intended to destroy.”

Pope Pius IX declared the Sacred Heart of Jesus an obligatory feast in 1856. Pope Leo XIII decreed in 1899 that the consecration of the entire human race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus should take place on June 11, 1899. He also encouraged the entire Roman Catholic episcopate to promote the First Friday Devotions, established June as the Month of the Sacred Heart, and included the Prayer of Consecration to the Sacred Heart. Pope Leo XIII called this “the great act” of his pontificate.

On May 15, 1956, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Pope Pius IX's institution of the feast, Pope Pius XII issued an encyclical letter with a lengthy instruction on the devotion to the Sacred Heart. On May 15, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI sent a letter to Father Peter Hans Kolvenbach, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, on the 50th anniversary of the encyclical, reaffirming the importance of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In his Angelus address on June 27, 1982, Pope St. John Paul II said, "The month of June is dedicated, in a special way, to the veneration of the divine Heart. Not just one day, the liturgical festival that usually falls in June, but every day. This is linked to the devout practice of praying or singing the litanies to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus daily."

On June 11, 1999, the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Pope St. John Paul II marked the 100th anniversary of the consecration of the human race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus with a letter in which he wrote, "The consecration of the human race in 1899 represents an extraordinarily important step on the Church's journey and it is still good to renew it every year on the feast of the Sacred Heart. . . . The words of Leo XIII still ring true: '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' (Annum sacrum, n. 11). Is this not the program of the Second Vatican Council and of my own Pontificate?"

On June 1, 2022, Pope Francis urged Catholics to look to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a source of love and to bring Christ's love "to the ends of the earth." Speaking in St. Peter's Square at the end of his Wednesday general audience, the Holy Father said, "Today we begin the month dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, source of love and peace. Open yourselves to this love and take it 'to the ends of the earth,' witnessing to the goodness and mercy that flow from the Heart of Jesus."

Let us open our hearts to receive His grace and share His message of hope with the world.

May God give us this grace. Amen.