

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

June 27, 2025

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

It is good to be with you to celebrate the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the patronal feast of this church and a time for all of us to deepen our devotion to His endless love and mercy.

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.

Subsequent Popes have also written and spoken eloquently about the Sacred Heart of Jesus. 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 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 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.

The last encyclical letter of Pope Francis before his death was on the theme of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Issued on the 24th of October of 2024, the encyclical letter bears the title in Latin, *Dilexit nos*, which means, "He loved us," as Saint Paul says of Christ in his *Letter to the Romans* (cf. *Rom* 8:37).

If you have not done so, I encourage you to read it, as it is available on the [Vatican website](#). Here are some highlights:

2. The symbol of the heart has often been used to express the love of Jesus Christ. Some have questioned whether this symbol is still meaningful today. Yet living as we do in an age of superficiality, rushing frenetically from one thing to another without really knowing why, and ending up as insatiable

consumers and slaves to the mechanisms of a market unconcerned about the deeper meaning of our lives, all of us need to rediscover the importance of the heart.

3. In classical Greek, the word *kardía* denotes the inmost part of human beings, animals and plants. For Homer, it indicates not only the center of the body, but also the human soul and spirit. In the *Iliad*, thoughts and feelings proceed from the heart and are closely bound one to another. The heart appears as the locus of desire and the place where important decisions take shape. In Plato, the heart serves, as it were, to unite the rational and instinctive aspects of the person, since the impulses of both the higher faculties and the passions were thought to pass through the veins that converge in the heart. From ancient times, then, there has been an appreciation of the fact that human beings are not simply a sum of different skills, but a unity of body and soul with a coordinating center that provides a backdrop of meaning and direction to all that a person experiences.

4. The Bible tells us that, “the Word of God is living and active... it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (*Heb 4:12*). In this way, it speaks to us of the heart as a core that lies hidden beneath all outward appearances, even beneath the superficial thoughts that can lead us astray. The disciples of Emmaus, on their mysterious journey in the company of the risen Christ, experienced a moment of anguish,

confusion, despair and disappointment. Yet, beyond and in spite of this, something was happening deep within them: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?” (Lk 24:32). ...

11. If we devalue the heart, we also devalue what it means to speak from the heart, to act with the heart, to cultivate and heal the heart. If we fail to appreciate the specificity of the heart, we miss the messages that the mind alone cannot communicate; we miss out on the richness of our encounters with others; we miss out on poetry. We also lose track of history and our own past, since our real personal history is built with the heart. At the end of our lives, that alone will matter. ...

18. We see, then, that in the heart of each person there is a mysterious connection between self-knowledge and openness to others, between the encounter with one’s personal uniqueness and the willingness to give oneself to others. We become ourselves only to the extent that we acquire the ability to acknowledge others, while only those who can acknowledge and accept themselves are then able to encounter others. ...

31. In the end, that Sacred Heart is the unifying principle of all reality, since “Christ is the heart of the world, and the paschal mystery of His death and resurrection is the center of history, which, because of Him, is a history of salvation.” All creatures “are moving forward with us and through us towards

a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things." In the presence of the heart of Christ, I once more ask the Lord to have mercy on this suffering world in which he chose to dwell as one of us. May He pour out the treasures of His light and love, so that our world, which presses forward despite wars, socio-economic disparities and uses of technology that threaten our humanity, may regain the most important and necessary thing of all: its heart.

Just today, our new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, sent a [letter to all priests](#) on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of the Clergy. In it, the Holy Father said:

On this Day for the Sanctification of Priests, celebrated on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I address each of you with gratitude and great confidence. The Heart of Christ, pierced for love, is the living and life-giving flesh that embraces each of us and conforms us to the image of the Good Shepherd. There we discover the true nature of our ministry. Consumed by God's mercy, we become joyful witnesses of his love that heals, accompanies and redeems. Today's Solemnity thus renews in our own hearts the call to be completely committed to the service of God's holy people. This mission starts with prayer and is carried out in union with the Lord, who

constantly revives in us the sacred gift of our vocation to the priesthood. ...

Today, then, I invite you to renew before the Heart of Christ the “yes” that you said to God and to his holy People on the day of your Ordination. Let yourselves be shaped by grace and guard the fire of the Spirit received on that day, so that, in union with him, you may be a sacrament of Jesus’ love in the world. Do not be daunted by your personal frailty: the Lord does not look for perfect priests, but for humble hearts that are open to conversion and prepared to love others as he himself loved us. ...

Throughout this Holy Year, in which all of us are called to be pilgrims of hope, our ministry will be all the more fruitful the more it is rooted in prayer and forgiveness, and in closeness to the poor, to families and to young people who are searching for truth. Never forget that a holy priest makes holiness flourish around him. Entrusting all of you to Mary, Queen of Apostles and Mother of Priests, I bless each of you from my heart.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, on this Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, let us join with our Holy Father to open our hearts to receive God’s grace and share His message of hope with the world.

May God give us this grace. Amen.