



THE SACRED HEART: A RADICAL LOVE

by Sister Miriam Rose

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Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

Today we have experienced the commemoration of Our Lord's triumphal entrance into Jerusalem that marks the beginning of Passiontide. We sang, along with the people of Jerusalem, "Hosanna to the Son of David." But for us, we know already how this week will end, and how it will turn to violence, tragedy and sadness, then to everlasting joy in the Resurrection.

We see Jesus humbly seated on a colt, entering the city as King, yet in his heart, he knows what is to come. "One who has surrendered to it knows that the way ends in the cross—even when it is leading through the jubilation of Gennesaret or the triumphal entry into Jerusalem." (Dag Hammarskjöld.)

Christ's love for all of us is a radical love that many did not, and some still do not, understand. Christ's love for each one of us, exemplified in his Sacred Heart, is a very deep and personal love. A love we will find in no other person, place, situation, or experience. As Jesus entered the city, he wept, saying: "If you had known, in this your day, the things that are to your peace." [Luke 19:42]

Johann Tauler, a German Dominican (d. 1361) wrote a book of spiritual exercises on the passion and in it he mentions the Sacred Heart fifty times: "What more could he still do for us, that he has not done? He has opened his very heart to us, as the most secret chamber wherein to lead our soul, ... For it is his joy to be with us in silent stillness, and in peaceful silence to rest there with us.... He gives us his heart entirely, that it may be our home. He desires our hearts in return that they may be his dwelling place."

In our modern understanding of the word RADICAL, we associate it frequently with something "out there" or away from the center. But its original meaning is much the opposite: from the Latin—radix—root—getting back to the origin and beginning of something; being the source and connection with. Christ's radical love on this Passion Sunday, through this Holy Week and on into Easter and beyond, is the root of all of our salvation. It is rooted not only in the compassion of his humanity, but also in the mercy and justice of his divinity. It is only in this love that he can accomplish the fulfillment of his task—his suffering and death to his final resurrection— to bring us to salvation.

Only with a radical love can Our Lord wash the feet of Judas, hours before being betrayed; only with a radical love can Our Lord look at Peter after his denial; only with a radical love can Our Lord go to his death, forgiving his executioners. Charles de Foucauld said: "To love anyone is to hope in him always." Our Lord loved to the end, never giving up on anyone, even forgiving the thief who hung beside him. This is the love that is offered to us in the Sacred Heart. Here is the root of all love.



It is to this root that we are “grafted” at our baptism. It is through this connectedness that we have our spiritual lives. To be rooted is more than to be connected to; it is also to be nourished and fed. Christ’s love in the Sacred Heart is the source of the needed nourishment of our souls. And it is always present and available to us. St. Mechtilde, a German mystic of the 13th century heard Jesus say to her: “My Sacred Heart is a treasury of all graces which I confer on you unceasingly. It is the source of all those interior consolations and of the ineffable sweetness which I lavish on my faithful friends.” We notice in this statement that our calling is to receptivity to Christ’s love, which is not contingent upon our merits but on our openness.

This rooted love and nourishment of graces can be seen like the growth of a tree. We know that, as the hidden roots spread, the canopy spreads in like manner. An oak and a chestnut have large canopies while the sequoia and redwood grow tall and thin, requiring a deep root. The water and nourishment needed to sustain its life flows continually, as long as the tree is connected to its root system. There is no question about the tree’s “openness” to such nourishment!

We, too, must be consciously connected to this spiritual root system of God’s love as expressed over the centuries to many deeply prayerful people through special communications, so that we can know and experience and believe. Karl Rahner, a modern German theologian, understood the Sacred Heart of Jesus to be a profound symbol of the mystery of being loved by God *personally*. The love of the Sacred Heart is always there. It is our openness, our response that is needed. It is a place of peace, a refuge in any suffering. It is not outside us, but within us.

Here are some suggested ways in which to respond in prayer and in the presence of an image of the Sacred Heart:

- ✚ Ask for the grace to let your heart become clear and open.
- ✚ Dialogue with the Sacred Heart in the image and let it “speak” back to you, being sure to ask what it wants you to know or do.
- ✚ Find a felt sense of the Sacred Heart within yourself and visualize yourself acting according to it
- ✚ Show thanksgiving for whatever revelation or help has come to you.

In this Lenten–Spring season, it is time to clear away any weeds or lifeless matter around *our* root system, letting the soil be readied for the warmth of the sun and for new nutrients to be applied. With a new season, giving us the hope of the resurrection, we can be resolved to begin anew by looking once again at this radical love Christ has for us; the expression of that love in this coming Holy Week, and our receptivity and response to it.

Our own St. Francis de Sales expressed well how our rootedness in the Divine Heart can bring forth good fruit. He said: “Whoever has Jesus in his heart will soon have him in all his outward behavior.” He also stated: “In Jesus the human is divinized and God is humanized so that God, without ceasing to be God, is



human and humans, without ceasing to be human, are God.” It is the theme of the divine life residing in the hidden life of ourselves.

Going before the Sacred Heart in prayer, we can deepen our commitment to love by our prayers of reparation for our own failings and the sins of the world. We can strengthen our “root” bond with our great Source of life and love by being faithful to all that is asked of us in our daily lives. And, we can give ourselves daily to that Heart that has first loved us, given his own life for us, in a most intimate and personal way.

Andrew of Crete in the 8th century wrote: It is ourselves that we must spread under Christ’s feet, not coats or lifeless branches or shoots of trees, matter which wastes away and delights the eye only for a few brief hours. But we have clothed ourselves with Christ’s grace, with the whole Christ—“for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”—so let us spread ourselves like coats under his feet.