

THE SACRED HEART OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT



Eight days after the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Octave days, the Church celebrates the great Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Except, of course, most Anglicans have never heard of this celebration and even those churches which realise the Catholic heritage of the Church of England may not recognise this Feast. This is to our loss for, as Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal

Church of the USA, preached about at the wedding of their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, love is the way; and the one symbol that speaks to all about love is – the heart. And the Church has the wonder of the Sacred Heart to offer people – a Heart which is not just concerned with the joys of love, but also knows about passion and pain. It was while she was kneeling in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament that Jesus appeared to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque displaying His Heart, *“represented as a throne of fire with flames radiating on every side. It appeared more brilliant than the sun and transparent like crystal. The wound received on the Cross appeared clearly: There was a crown of thorns around the Heart and it was surmounted by a cross.”* This is the Sacred Heart of Christ’s Passion which, unlike other images of love, constantly reminds us of its true cost. This is a gift the Church of England sadly neglects.

At Christmas we celebrate the Incarnation of Love as Love reveals His Presence among us, a Presence we celebrate in and through each Eucharist. It’s a Presence which is Real, a Presence which we need to penetrate and which needs to penetrate us if we are to encounter the Heart of God. At Christmas we behold Love clothed in Flesh, Flesh which suffered, died, rose from the grave and ascended into heaven. Love left us the sacrament of that Presence, and whilst the eye of the body beheld Jesus within Crib the eye of the heart can now begin to see the wonder of Emmanuel – the Love of God with us abiding in the Blessed Sacrament.

In his book *The Drawing of This Love* the author, Robert Fruewirth, explores aspects of the way the 14th century English mystic, Dame Julian of Norwich, realised how that Divine Love is permeated by compassion. In one chapter he quotes Julian saying: *‘Here I saw a great affinity between Christ and us ... for when he was in pain, we were in pain. And all creatures capable of suffering pain suffered with him ... So was our Lord Jesus Christ set at nought for us, and we all remain in this way as if set at naught with him, and shall do until we come to his bliss...’* (Ch.18) Divine Compassion lies in the depths of the Sacred Heart – indeed, is the way in which that Heart is to be understood and we can always be present to His compassion when we come before Him in the Blessed Sacrament. So people have longed to look upon that loving compassion and can do so when the Sacrament is exposed to our gaze on the altar. There we can be present to Him as He is present to us when the Sacrament is exposed on the altar; if only every church offered times when this practice so that all can sit or kneel in prayer in His Presence. If churches helped people to come and adore Him who longed – and longs – to be with us! There we can talk with Him or just rest with Him and know that He is fully present to all who come to Him. We could just curl up before Him who opens His Heart to us in the Sacrament of Divine Love.

But even if we cannot find an open church where the brilliance of the Host shines out we can always take Him with us in the tabernacle of *our* heart for, as St Francis of Assisi wrote in his Rule of 1221: *‘We should make a dwelling-place within ourselves where He can stay, He who is the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’* Dame Julian echoes this theme when later she wrote: *‘Then with a glad expression our Lord looked into his side and gazed, rejoicing and with his dear gaze he led his creature’s understanding through the same wound into his side within. And then he revealed a beautiful and delightful place, large enough for all mankind that shall be saved to rest there in peace and in love.’* (Ch.24) That ‘place’ is His Sacred Heart, a

Heart large enough to contain all of us, a Heart enlarged by compassion. This is the Sacrament of Love upon which we are invited to gaze, as Julian gazed on what was revealed to her. It is a wonderful thing that we who have been made part of His Body can gaze on that Body which is lit up with Love – as one might look on a building flooded with light both inside and out, throbbing with all the colours there are against the darkness that surround it – a darkness of both sin and a lack of recognition. This is what we are to realise as we gaze on His Incarnate Body shown to us in the monstrance.

God enables us to fashion an *inner*-monstrance of the heart which is to be the dwelling-place for Jesus where we can adore Him whenever we visit that place. Few churches can offer perpetual Adoration but He can always be with us and we can always adore Him whenever we choose to make this visit to our heart. But wouldn't it be wonderful if more Anglican churches – cathedrals, certainly – offered this facility? There is a wonderful Tabernacle House, for example, in Southwark Cathedral (which may come from the Convent of the sisters of the Community of Reparation to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament founded in 1869 and ended with the death of the last sister in the early years of this century).

It's exquisitely beautiful to come to Jesus in this way and be able to just rest with Him – 'be there' with Him who is in all places and fills all things yet who left us this way to realise His presence. It's a presence that doesn't require any words and the only effort is to focus attention on Him and Him alone. To be able to do this in places like Westminster Cathedral and [Tyburn Convent](#) in Hyde Park Place is a joy which all would benefit from realising. And when that is not possible we can make a virtual visit to adore Jesus through a number of websites which offer that facility.

Thankfully even though we may not be able to visit those places, He dwells in the hearts of all who turn aside to Him and unlock the door to this inner sanctuary. The Sacred Heart is like a door leading into the very soul of Christ, towards complete conformity to Him.

"Devotion to the Sacred Heart has a twofold object: it honours first with adoration and public worship the Heart of flesh of Jesus Christ, and secondly the infinite love with which this Heart has burned for us since its creation, and with which it is still consumed in the Sacrament of our altars." (St. Peter Julian Eymard)