

*HEART
TO
HEART*

*Prayerful Reflections
on the Love of Christ*

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INTRODUCTION

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus has a long and impressive history. Many feel that it began when Mary felt the first signs of Christ's Heart beating next to her own as he grew in her womb. St. John the Apostle rested his head on Christ's breast at the Last Supper and tells us how Christ would give the ultimate proof of his love by laying down his life for his friends. St. Paul speaks of Christ's love as an inexhaustible treasure of riches.

Mystics in the Middle Ages found the wound in Christ's side a ready approach as they drew close to Christ's Heart. St. Peter Canisius in the late 1500's sought strength in the Heart of Christ before he went off to stem the tide of heresy in Germany. Christ appeared to St. Margaret Mary in 1673 and showed her his Heart aflame with love but surrounded by the thorns of people's coldness and indifference. Her confidant and spiritual director, St. Claude Colombiere, worked with Margaret to spread the devotion to England and various parts of Europe. One hundred years later a Church feast was established to honor Christ's Heart and offer him reparation, and in 1856 that feast was extended to the entire Church. The 100th anniversary of this event was commemorated by Pius XII's encyclical "Haurietis Aquas" ("*You shall draw water [from the fountains of salvation]*"), where he declared: "It is beyond question that this devotion is an act of religion of high order".

Pope Benedict XVI says that devotion to the Heart of Christ "has an irreplaceable importance for our faith and for our life in love". (Letter on the 50th anniversary of the encyclical *Haureatis Aquas*, 15 May 2006)

A deeply spiritual approach to Christ's Sacred Heart, based on scriptural passages and prayerful reflection, will steer well away from the mawkish sentimentality that has tarnished this devotion among many believers. Love is first of all a strong and powerful force that leads to greathearted, daring and unselfish action, as it was for Jesus Christ. It is a pledge of total dedication, an absolute gift of oneself. It is a force strong enough to weather every crisis and forgive every failing, as St. Paul tells us (1 Cor. 13). Love is usually thought of as being centered in the heart.

This booklet takes a prayerful approach to considering various aspects of Christ's love as suggested by the gospels and the letters of St. Paul. These reflections are meant not so much to be read as to be prayed over. A slow approach is recommended, whereby a person reads over a brief section of the text, perhaps going back to the scripture passage, and reflects prayerfully on it, phrase by phrase, before moving ahead to other parts. There is no need to complete a particular section within a given time. The main idea is to use these ideas as stepping stones to talking with God and deepening one's sense of Christ's love. Thus, it is important to take enough time at the beginning of each prayer period to position oneself squarely in God's presence, and to return to that realization repeatedly during prayer, so that "heart speaks to heart".

May these few reflections help you to acquire a new and powerful understanding of Christ's love as reflected in his Sacred Heart.

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Bible quotations are taken from *The New American Bible* (New York: Benziger, 1970).

NO GREATER LOVE

When I look up at your crucified body, Lord, I see that gash in your side where the centurion pierced your side with his lance. From that wound, John's gospel tells us, poured out blood and water. His lance clearly reached your Heart and it proved that you were truly dead.

You told your apostles that a person can show no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. When you laid down your life on the cross, I know that you looked down through the centuries and knew that you were dying for us. You were dying for me. As St. Paul said: "[He] loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Your love, Lord is like the massive power of the sun at midday, pouring forth relentlessly and blazing down intensely on everything it touches. Or like a mighty wave that has rolled down through the centuries and now overwhelms me with its force.

The love of your Heart is so powerful that nothing can resist its force. Nothing, that is, unless we shield ourselves from it and put up a mighty barrier against its advance. Lord, work with me to tear down these barriers to your love, to lay myself open to your overwhelming power.

How foolish of me to try to resist the force of your love. And yet I do so every day. I say I don't have time to spend with you in prayer. I involve myself in hundreds of petty concerns. I hide myself in flimsy distractions. And I do more than that; I counter your love with my own selfish indulgence. I turn away from you and give in to sin. In sinning, I have found a way to stand up against you in the strongest way possible.

Lord, it is no secret. I am most unworthy of your love. You knew that when you died for me on the cross. And yet you gave up your life for me anyway, . . . for your "friend". Oh, would that I were really your friend. Maybe then I would have been worth dying for.

Yet you overlooked my many disloyalties, my weakness, my inconstancy, and you took a chance. You hoped you could convince me by your love that I could indeed become your friend. Show me how that's possible, Lord. Help me to tear away whatever is shielding me from your power. Make me totally open to the power of your love.

WITH ALL YOUR HEART

"One of the scribes . . . put a further question to [Jesus], 'Which is the first of all the commandments?' Jesus replied, 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one, only Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.'" (Mark 12:28-30)

This lawyer seemed an honest man. Christ told him later he was "not far from the kingdom of God". The Lord was happy to get a question like this; it gave him a chance to

teach something very important. Also, it offered a window into his own Heart. *Show me, Lord what your answer tells me about yourself, so that I may begin to love God the way you do.*

You have a totally human Heart, Lord. Your whole being as man is like ourselves. Your Heart is like ours. It is a warm and loving heart, filled with tenderness and compassion, fully open to love and ready to embrace all that is good.

Your Heart, Jesus, was formed and inspired in a special way by the Holy Spirit, who “overshadowed” Mary and enabled her to conceive you in her womb. From the moment you became man, your Heart was absorbed with the worship and love of God.

You were filled, Lord, with an overwhelming sense of the goodness of God your Father. You mirrored in your Heart the immense strength of his love for you. He alone merited, and satisfied, your great desires, the absolute attachment of your Heart.

And so, when the lawyer asked this question, you welcomed the chance to tell what was deepest in your Heart: the compelling need to embrace with one’s whole heart the one, true, and only God: “Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one, only Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart...”. You could have added: “. . . the same way I love him, with all my Heart”. For you were speaking from the depths of your own feeling, from your own personal love of God, your Father and Lord.

What is it, Lord, to love God “with all your heart”? Looking at you, I can see what it means for you. When a person speaks of someone he or she loves, others see it written on their face, in their voice, in the look of their eyes. I look at you, Jesus, on the pages of the gospel and I see it there; I can tell it from the warmth of your voice. I know you are speaking from your Heart.

It is the first phrase you use: “with all your heart”. You love God with a feeling so strong that we feel privileged to catch even the slightest touch of it in your words. When your Heart speaks, we are in touch with the deepest wellsprings of your human personality. We are seeing the feelings that define your humanity.

We see these feelings when a young man speaks of the woman he loves—his love is written all over his face. We say “he is wearing his heart on his sleeve”. We see this in you too, Jesus. There is almost no need of any words; we know how much you love from the look on your face.

Help me to know your Heart. Let me sense the richness and power of the love you have for God your Father. I know that your love for him is at the base of every other movement of your Heart. I want it to be that way for me, too. Show me your Heart.

You went on from there, Lord, to say: “with all your soul” and “with all your mind”. What do you want me to understand by this? The love of your Heart, you want me to know, is a love of your entire being, of every fiber of your humanity. It is not only a love of your feelings, but it is a

love of your mind and of your very soul; it is a love from deep within your spirit. “God is Spirit”, you told the Samaritan woman at the well, “and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth”. (John 4:24)

Your love for God, Jesus, is a total, all-consuming love. It is an intense love: “with all your strength”. It occupies the center of your being and it is the core reality of your life. All this you summed up by saying to love “with all your heart”.

FORMED BY THE SPIRIT

The archangel Gabriel said Mary would conceive a child by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Lk 1:35) Once that happened, Lord, your young body would, within a few weeks, experience the beating of a human Heart. That Heart, formed by the Holy Spirit, is the symbol of the powerful love you have for us, a love breathed into you by that same Spirit. We identify your love with that Heart; in fact, we speak of your love as coming from your Heart.

We know, Lord, that love calls forth a response in the heart of the beloved. We say that “heart speaks to heart”, and that is certainly what you expect when you love us so intensely. To love you as you deserve, I need a heart like yours. I ask the Holy Spirit to form in me a heart like your own, one that is as open to receive your love as you are to give it.

My own heart seems so cramped and limited, even in response to other human love. When I think of the heart of Mother Teresa or the Little Flower, of St. Francis or St. Ignatius, I am astonished at their openness to love. They welcomed love—from God, from people—and they returned it so richly. You made their hearts, Spirit of God. You formed them as you formed the infant Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Holy Spirit, form that same kind of heart in me, so I can welcome the tremendous power of Christ’s love. I want to mirror that love every day of my life.

Lord, I know one heart that resonated perfectly with your own Heart. It was the heart of Mary, your mother. That heart too was always under the power of the Spirit. It was a pure heart without the least spot or blemish to block the love of her son Jesus. I ask simply: Holy Spirit, make my heart as open as hers, so that I can admit the force of Christ’s love as she did. Spirit of God, give me a heart like Mary’s.

PERFECT IMAGE OF THE FATHER

Jesus, we believe that, as God, you are “one in being with the Father”. (Nicene Creed) From all eternity you have shared the divine nature in its fullness, in the absolute perfection of its being. And so, when God sent you among us as man, it is clear that you would be the “image of the invisible God”, “the exact representation of the Father’s being” (Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3)

You told us: “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30) and “Whoever looks on me is seeing him who sent me” (John 12:45). So it is that we think of your human Heart as a perfect mirror of the Father’s love. The tremendous self-giving of God our Creator has poured into your Heart his own immense love, so that you could perfectly reflect his love to the world.

Jesus tells me: “When the Word became flesh (John 1:14), the greatness of the Father’s love was embodied in my Heart. Think of my Heart in that way. As part of my humanity, there is no more precious, more noble object in all the world. My Heart is the perfect image of the Father in every other way also. My Heart is the perfect expression of my Father’s mercy, of his compassion for the poor and suffering, of his kindness toward those in sorrow, of his absolute goodness, his holiness, his overwhelming generosity. As I said to Philip: ‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.’” (John 14:9)

When I think of your Heart, Lord, as the perfect reflection of the Father’s love, what do you want me to do? What difference should this make in my life?

Jesus says: “Since I am the image of the Father, you should see the Father when you see me. When I show kindness to a poor beggar, think of God my Father bending down and touching his life. When I show mercy, know that it is my Father showing mercy through me. The Father is acting through me. Always, let me lead you to the Father. You should go to the Father through me”.

Jesus continues: “My friend, let me say more. Just as I am the perfect image of the Father, so people should see in you the perfect image of myself. When they look at you, it should be like looking at me. I expect you to identify yourself with me as I identify with the Father. Your whole life should be dedicated to becoming more and more a perfect likeness of me”.

Thank you, Lord, for being the perfect image of the Father. Thank you for making it clear what a privilege it is to know you, to know the Father in seeing you, and to be called to love as you love.

UNFATHOMABLE RICHES

Let me speak to St. Paul. You said you preached to the Gentiles the “unfathomable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). What did you mean, Paul? He says: “When I heard the apostles tell of their days with Jesus—what he did and what he said—I was full of excitement. I wanted to know every word he spoke, every move he made. I inquired about everything.

“Then I spent a long time reflecting and praying. God was good to me and I got to see a whole new dimension of Christ. There was, I discovered, something even deeper about Jesus—something more than his words and actions. There was a mystery here and I found myself on the edge of it. I wanted to penetrate deeper and deeper into this mystery. The deeper I went, the more there was to see. I finally realized that the reality of Jesus is too vast for me to penetrate.

The riches of his being are so great that I will never understand them all. Wherever you look, whatever you find, you are just touching the surface. And yet, what you find is worth all the searching in the world”.

Thank you, St. Paul, for this explanation. I want to come to know these “unfathomable riches”. Where shall I start in understanding this extraordinary treasure? Be my guide.

Paul says: “You and others must ask Christ to enter into your spirit, to ‘dwell in your hearts through faith’ (Eph 3:17), to live in you, as he promised at the Last Supper. When Christ lives in you, you will find that charity has become ‘the root and foundation of your life’. The love of Christ’s Heart will fill your entire being and your heart will expand to experience ‘the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ’s love’ (Ephesians 3:17-18).

“In his goodness, Christ will allow you not just to know this love, but to experience it richly, because it is something beyond mere knowledge (Ephesians 3:19). You will find that it far exceeds anything you can comprehend. Why is that? Because you will be touching the very depths of the reality of Christ. He is the perfect image of the Father and consequently he reflects God’s infinite love to an extraordinary degree. Soon you will find that you are filled with the ‘fullness of God himself.’ (Ephesians 3:19)”

Jesus, I know that love really has no limits. It will go anywhere, do anything, accept any challenge, bear any burden.

Jesus responds: “Yes, love is like that. You see it in saints like Francis Xavier and John Brebeuf. You see it in married couples who sacrifice everything for each other. You see it in persons like Mother Teresa and Pope John XXIII. All these are people who have drawn their power from the tremendous love of my Heart, and their energy knew no limits”.

Most of all, Lord, I see that kind of driving energy in St. Paul. He rejoiced that you were living within him, that you were in fact his very life force. He says that the love of Christ drove him on (2 Cor 5:14), so that he preached to Jews and gentiles, to those who listened and believed, and to those who hated him, abused and humiliated him.

Jesus says, “You are right, my friend. St. Paul never stopped preaching Christ. He dug ever deeper into the unfathomable riches of my Heart, and he taught you to make charity the root and foundation of your lives. Paul is a sure guide as you grow in an understanding of the Heart of Christ”.

HE MADE HIS DWELLING AMONG US

We read in Scripture that God dwells in unapproachable light. (1 Tim 6:16). Lord Jesus, how can we come close to him, when his very holiness makes us feel so shabby in his presence? It sometimes seems that an unbridgeable chasm exists between God and us. Yet St. Paul tells us that all people everywhere can come to a knowledge of God, that we can find him through the world around us (cf. Romans 1:20).

God says: “Even in the Old Testament people felt that I was remote. No one could look on my face and live. People usually approached me with fear and trembling. Still, Moses told my people: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength”. (Deuteronomy 6:5) Most of the Hebrew people found this very hard.

“So I took an extraordinary step. I determined to enter directly into the world. I would become man and live among my people. I would show mankind my kindness and love in the person of Jesus Christ. He would reveal my love in a human Heart”.

Jesus says: “If you look in the Old Testament, you will see that God told you of his love again and again, but you did not believe. So I came to *show* you God’s love in my own person. I came to live among you, to give you myself fully. As John says: Of my fullness you have all received (John 1:16). In my love, I would hold nothing back, even to dying for you on the cross”.

I know that John the apostle had an intimate sense of the personal reality of Jesus. He rested on his breast at the Last Supper and stood by him on Calvary. He writes in his First Letter:

This is what we proclaim to you:
what was from the beginning,
what we have heard,
what we have seen with our eyes,
what we have looked upon
and our hands have touched—
we speak of the word of life.
(This life became visible,
we have seen and bear witness to it ...) (1 John 1:1-2)

God says: “Don’t think of me today as being remote. I am with you in the person of Jesus. You see his love every day as he feeds the hungry multitudes, as he heals Peter’s mother-in-law, as he raises his friend Lazarus to life. Even today, Jesus lives among you in the Eucharist, offers himself for you in the Mass, and comes to you in Holy Communion”.

I must not think of you, Jesus, as being 2000 years away or only as far off in heaven. You live in us, and you open your Heart to us whenever we seek you in faith. Jesus, you live out the name given you in Isaiah (7:14): Emmanuel, “God with us”.

COME TO ME

Lord Jesus, when you walked the dusty roads of Palestine, you were a famous figure. Crowds followed you, important people came to consult you, and you were hounded by your enemies, who had targeted you for death. Yet what we see in the gospels is that you always directed your attention to individual persons—like Peter, James and John, Levi, the widow of Naim who had lost her only son, Mary who bathed your feet with her tears, and later Paul—and you said to them simply: “Come, follow me”, or “Come to me”. Even when you invited people in general, we could always understand your words as directed to us individually:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. For my yoke is easy and my burden light”. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Christ says: “Come to me, . . . for I am gentle and humble of heart”. You are inviting me, Lord, to be close to you, and to find comfort in your gentle and humble spirit. You want me to discover the qualities of your Heart, of your love. Who could remain untouched by such an attractive invitation? When you call me to know your Heart, to experience your love, could I possibly refuse?

Yet we know that many do refuse your invitation. I refuse it, too—possibly many times each day. What kind of insanity is this—that I should refuse to draw strength from your Heart, the source of living waters? (cf. John 7:38) You want to bring me to the “unfathomable riches” of your Heart, and I am too lazy to come—or too distracted, or too preoccupied, or too embarrassed by my unworthiness. If you invite me, will you not also give me the courage to accept?

“My friend, when I call you in particular to come to me, I want to share with you my most precious gift, my love. I complained to St. Margaret Mary that people were cold and indifferent to my love. I don’t want you to be that way. Cast off your fears and your hesitation and run to join me and to experience my affection for you. Once you have felt my love for you, you will want to be one with me—as it were, yoked together--so that we can bear our burdens together”.

Christ continues: “What peace can you find apart from me? You remember what Augustine came to realize: ‘Our hearts are made for you, O Lord, and they will not rest until they rest in you.’ When will you come to accept this? Will you have to wait thirty years, the way Augustine waited? Will you ever find this peace during your entire life? Why not listen to my word now, surrender yourself, and come to me? I will do what you want most of all. I will show you my love, my Heart, and your life will never be the same again”.

LEARN OF ME

When you call us to come to you, Jesus, you are inviting us to be your disciples, that is, to learn from you. That's what the word *disciple* means; it's more than just being a follower. It means listening carefully to what you say, watching intently how you act, coming to know you thoroughly. It means getting to the core of yourself as a person and finding out what drives you to do what you do.

Lord, when I watch you every day—curing the sick, feeding the crowds, teaching about the kingdom of God—I know that the driving force behind all your actions is the power of love. You show it in everything you do; you can't hide it. You are driven by love—love for your Father and love for all the people whose lives you touch. That's not surprising, since you are the perfect image of your Father and, as John tells us, God is love. (1John 4:8)

But isn't everyone driven by love? Yes, but often it is love for oneself: for pleasure, for money, for power, for control. How many are driven by love of their neighbor? That's what you came to teach us, isn't it?

Christ says: "When you've come to me and we are walking together every day, you'll understand that nothing but love can explain everything I do. You'll see me driving myself mercilessly, pushing on from town to town, talking to large crowds, teaching my disciples, healing broken bodies and tired spirits, freeing people from devils, bringing the dead back to life, finally pressing on to Jerusalem to give myself into the hands of my enemies. I will lay down my life for my friends—for people of all times and places; greater love than this no one has.

"I especially wanted my disciples to love one another. I called this my great new commandment—to love as I loved. I was constantly teaching them this by my example and by my love for them. They learned this from the lessons of my Heart. You who have become my disciples must come to my Heart and learn that love is the dynamo for generous, greathearted persons. It drives you to sacrifice everything for the people you work with every day".

You said, Lord, "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart". (Matthew 11:29) Besides the power of love, what else are you teaching us?

"You must learn from my Heart to be humble. When you give your best efforts to helping others, realize always that you are being led by the Spirit, as I was in everything I did. I realized too that I was always working with my Father, that I could do nothing by myself. (cf. John 5:19) That must be the secret of your power, to know that all your strength comes from God. He is the one who always makes it possible for you to use the talents he has given you.

"You must also learn to be gentle. You recall that I said the rich and powerful lord it over others, but my disciples must be different. (Matthew 20:25-27) I said to take the lowest place, to consider yourself the servant of all. I also said you must forgive those who wrong you, you must

turn the other cheek, you must pray for your enemies. It is easy to see that humility, gentleness and the spirit of service all go together. When you think and act that way you have indeed become my disciple; you have learned from my example”.

THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT

“The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39). That’s the way, Lord, you concluded your answer to the scribe who asked you what was the greatest commandment. This must have come as something of a surprise. It goes beyond Moses’ words in Deuteronomy. It is your own addition, and it teaches us something important about the values of your Heart. Without adding love of neighbor to our love for God, we are failing by half in our task as Christians. We cannot possibly love God as we should unless we love our neighbor at the same time.

You made this point more concretely and more emphatically when you spoke about the Last Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. You said that, when the Son of Man gathers together all his angels and the people of all times and places, he will take into his heavenly kingdom only those people who have shown kindness and compassion when their neighbor needed their help.

Christ says, “Yes, my friend, it should be clear that you cannot please God, cannot really be followers of mine, unless you love your neighbor and care for his needs. That’s an extension of the great new commandment I gave my apostles, to love one another (John 15:12). This love extends to all your neighbors; it embraces a very wide spectrum indeed, as I pointed out in my parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) and my command to love even your enemies (Luke 6:27-28)”.

Lord, I need only think of the way you loved your own enemies (the Pharisees who wanted to put you to death, the crowd who cried out “Crucify him!” before Pilate, the soldiers who nailed you to the cross on Calvary), to get a good insight into love as it is found in the Heart of Christ.

I ask you to give me a heart that is as large and all-embracing as yours. Show me what real love requires from the example of St. Vincent de Paul amid the destitute of Paris, from St. Peter Claver with the wretched slaves of Carthage, from St. John Brebeuf working among the brutal Indians of North America, and from Mother Teresa picking up the emaciated bodies of those dying on the sidewalks of Calcutta. Let me learn love from them and from your own compassionate care for the sick and the lame, the possessed and the starving of ancient Palestine. Then I will come to know the length and breadth, the height and depth of your Heart, and the love that embraces all people in all their needs.

ASKING IN HIS NAME

The longer the disciples lived with Jesus--the more they listened to him and saw his power at work—the more strongly they believed that he was sent by God and that he was the promised Messiah. They saw his Heart go out to the large crowd of his followers and had the thrill of helping to distribute the food he multiplied for the five thousand hungry people. The next night, as they were rowing across the lake under a strong wind, they saw him walking toward them across the water. (John 6:5-21) They were not only astonished by all this; seeing so many examples of his power and his goodness, they had no doubt about who he was, and Peter readily confessed that he was indeed the Messiah. (John 6:69, Matthew 16:16)

Lord Jesus, Christians down through the centuries have believed that you are not only the promised Messiah, but that you are the very Son of God—the Word of God made flesh (John 1:13). Now that you are seated at the right hand of God, the power you showed during your life on earth is manifest in its fullness. With the Father and the Holy Spirit, you have supreme power as God and, as man, you are deeply concerned with this world and the affairs of all the people who live here.

Lord, we all are greatly in need of your help, but we sometimes wonder if we should ask God for a particular thing we need. Isn't it all included in the petition, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matt 6:11)? You rebuked the disciples for asking to be seated in places of honour in your heavenly kingdom (Mark 10:38). But you also responded to very many requests for favours and miracles. You prompted the blind man to ask you when you said, "What do you want me to do for you?" and he replied "I want to see" (Mark 10:51-52).

We worry about whether we're asking for too much, or for the wrong things, or in the wrong way. Why are we troubled about things like this? Don't we trust you enough? Won't you tell us if we're asking wrongly? It seems much more likely that we don't ask for enough, and that we don't ask insistently and perseveringly enough.

You said with emphasis: "Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you" (Luke 11:9). Certainly you meant exactly what you said. If we ask urgently and repeatedly, you will listen to us and hear our prayer. The woman knew that for a fact when she kept demanding justice from the unjust judge and he finally gave in to her demands (Luke 18:2-7).

You gave us an example yourself when you asked three times to be spared having to go on to a bitter crucifixion. (Matt 26:39-44) Even then, you knew your Father's will, but you asked anyway. Could we have a more convincing example of praying and never giving up?

Lord, give us the kind of faith that moves mountains (cf. Matt 21:21)—an absolute trust in you, and in your readiness to help us when we cry out to you in our need. After all, it's to your loving Heart that we are pleading, a Heart large enough to embrace the needs of an entire world. You had compassion on all who came to you in faith during your life on earth. Is it possible that you

would be less kind to us now that you have entered into your glory when we bring our needs with confidence in your love?

YOU ARE MY FRIENDS

For a long time, Jesus, you addressed your followers as your disciples or your servants. They did not take it amiss to be called your servants, for they felt privileged just to be in your company. Then came the Last Supper and you told them clearly that you were leaving them. You revealed to them mysteries like the fact that you are in the Father and the Father is in you, and you said you would send them the Holy Spirit.

It was during this time of intimate revelations that you called them your friends. You said:

This is my commandment:
Love one another as I have loved you.
There is no greater love than this:
to lay down one's life for one's friends.
You are my friends if you do what I command you.
I no longer speak of you as slaves [or servants],
for a slave does not know what his master is about.
Instead, I call you friends, since I have made known to you
all that I have heard from my Father. (John 15:12-15)

You regarded the apostles as your friends, so much had you grown to trust them with your deepest revelations. As you sat with them after the Last Supper (cf. John, chapters 14-17), you told them things they had never heard before. You said that it was good for you to leave them, for then you could send them your Holy Spirit. You foretold that they would have to suffer in proclaiming your name. You begged them to stay loyal to you and to remain closely united to one another. You compared their union with you to your own union with the Father.

All this you told them because you considered them your friends. Friends tell each other things that masters would never tell their servants. It was especially important for them to see themselves as your friends because you hoped for their support in your passion.

Lord Jesus, friendship is grounded in genuine love. You have shown many times that you regard me as your friend. You have revealed your Heart to me. I am astonished at your generosity to me when I think of how small-minded and selfish I have been to you. Lord, make me truly a friend of yours, a reflection of your friendship for me. Give me a strong sense of loyalty to you, so that I will do anything, suffer anything rather than betray our friendship.

“MY FLESH, FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD”

What does a person leave behind for his family or his friends when he is going to leave them for good? A picture of himself? Some object he has made especially for them? A last will or testament to protect their future welfare?

Jesus, when you were going to take leave of your friends, what did you decide to give them? They may have forgotten what you promised them a year before, but you had not forgotten. You had promised them something more precious than manna in the desert or a picture for their purses. You said you would give them the true bread from heaven. You said you would give them “[your] flesh, for the life of the world”. (John 6:51)

While they were stunned by this promise, and some took the occasion to leave your company, you knew exactly what you intended. It was an astonishing work of love, and you would give it to them just before your passion and death.

Starting his narrative of the Last Supper, St. John tells us that, when “the hour had come for [you] to pass from this world to the Father”, you loved your own in the world, “and would show [your] love for them to the end”. (John 13:1) After the supper, you took some bread, broke it and passed it out to your apostles, making it clear to them that this was your body; then later you passed around a goblet of wine declaring this was your blood.

By your action these were no longer bread and wine, but they were your body and blood. This great act of love would be your parting gift to them. What is more, you asked that they and those who came after them would continue to carry out this same action for all your followers down through the ages.

What did you intend, Lord, by this incomparable gift?

Jesus answers: “I would have to leave them, as my Father wanted. Yet I desired to remain with them as fully as possible. So much did I love them. And I wanted to assure my followers down through the centuries that I loved them just as much. Although they had never seen me, I loved those who would come later and I wanted to share myself with them as well. By communicating my life to them, I would form in them my very likeness. I would pour into their spirits a love like my own. I would give them a heart like mine.

“There was more”, Christ continues. “I would sacrifice myself the following day by dying on the cross. I knew my later followers could not be present with me on Calvary. So I would give them the means to take part in this sacrifice through the Mass for all time to come. They would understand that love had been the driving force behind my offering on the cross, and they would be able to join their love to mine.

“Besides this, when they were gathered in the Mass, I would pour out my love on them and always draw them together in a closer loving relationship”.

You were looking down into the future, Lord. What more did you see?

Jesus tells us: “I wanted everyone to know that my gift would have no end in its effects. I said that the person “who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal, and I will raise him up on the last day”. (John 6:54) I intended my followers to rise from the dead and spend all eternity with me. Sharing in my body and blood would be the best possible means to prepare for this perfect life”.

Lord, it seems to me that you could not have shown your love more clearly than when you gave your body and blood for your chosen disciples and to us as a perpetual gift at the Last Supper. It’s clear that you had a Heart large enough to embrace the entire world for all time. Christ responds, “Yes, I gave the Eucharist to my friends out of the same love that led me to lay down my life for them. There is no greater love that a person can show for his friends”.

SORROWFUL UNTO DEATH

Father, you saw your Son Jesus as he entered the Garden of Gethsemane and told his disciples his soul was sorrowful even unto death. You watched as his Heart became oppressed with sadness and anguish (Mt 26:37-38), and you must have felt compassion for him. He always took pity on those in sorrow or in need, and now there was no human being to feel compassion for him. Apart from you, he was all alone.

God says: “Yes, he was all alone. He asked his chosen disciples to stay awake and pray, but they disappointed him. And when the mob took Jesus prisoner, they all fled. He had no human consolation; I was his only strength”.

Lord, we are told he prayed so earnestly that he sweated blood. He even begged you to deliver him from this ordeal. Was it the thought of his terrible passion that so overwhelmed him in agony?

God answers: “My Son’s sorrow and agony went far beyond the physical pain of his passion. He had come to bring salvation to the Jews, his own people, and to all the world. He was happy to give hope to ordinary people, but he failed completely to convince the religious leaders of the Jews. They were against him from the start, and they never changed. They rejected him as the long-awaited Messiah and they turned the people against him. They would not be satisfied until they had eliminated him from the face of the earth.

“There was more. It was one of my Son’s disciples, Judas Iscariot, who handed him over to the Jewish leaders. In fact, in his treachery he arranged that he would identify Jesus by a kiss. And so he betrayed Christ’s friendship and trust. Beyond this, Jesus knew that even his strongest disciple, Peter, that night would deny that he even knew the Master—not once but three times! You can see that to be so completely rejected brought my Son’s Heart to the breaking point”.

Lord, I know that Jesus suffered because of my own sins, but, as much as these pained him, there must have been a much heavier burden that weighed upon his spirit.

“Yes”, God says, “when my Son became man, he was to bear the sins of the entire world on his shoulders. From the time of Adam and Eve to the end of the world—all the sins of people from all over the world, no matter how great or how small they were, how many or how few—all this evil was what Jesus carried with him into the Garden of Gethsemane and would continue to carry throughout his passion. He bore it all; he must atone for all these sins. He would win forgiveness for all those people who sought it. The whole world could be saved because of his sacrifice. Can you understand the burden that weighed upon his Heart that night?”

O God, when I think of the loving Heart of Jesus, which perfectly embodied your love for the world, I am overwhelmed with sorrow for what he was suffering. I know that I am part of this sinful world that has loaded him with pain and sorrow. What can I do to make up for it? How can repair the terrible agony that Christ was suffering?

I know that Jesus asked his friends to offer reparation to his Heart for all the hurt he has endured, especially because of the coldness and indifference of those who believe in him. In fact, in the gospel he asked us to share the yoke of his burden with him. (Matt 11:29-30) I want to offer my love and my work for others to bring him some comfort in his affliction.

I want also to offer my pains and humiliations, my patience amid setbacks, my loneliness, frustration and illness, my resisting of temptation and any other personal burdens I bear—all these I want to offer to Jesus to make up for the coldness of our response and the rejection of his love.

Father, let this be some small consolation I can offer the Heart of your Son.

MOCKED AND SCORNE

Father in heaven, you looked down on your Son Jesus in his passion and you were moved with pity. Were there certain times when you felt most deeply for him?

God says: “Yes, his other sufferings were terrible, but I think especially about those times when he was humiliated at the hands of his enemies. He had told his disciples that he was humble of heart (Matt 11:29), and St. Paul reminds you that, though he is divine, he humbled himself to the point of dying on the cross (Phil. 2:6-8). There are several times during his passion when you can see how grievously he was humbled by his enemies.

“There was the time when he had finished praying to me in the Garden of Gethsemene. A crowd of temple guards armed with swords and clubs came up, with Judas leading the

way. Jesus stood strong and noble before them and freely surrendered himself into their hands. They seized hold of him like a criminal, bound his hands and hustled him off roughly to the high priest's house. Jesus was affronted by their behaviour: 'Am I a brigand,' he said, 'that you have come armed with swords and clubs to arrest me?' (Matt 26:55) He reminded them that he sat teaching in the temple every day and they never arrested him. He was humiliated at the way they treated him like a common criminal".

Lord, most of us have never been treated like criminals or put in jail. It is hard enough for wrongdoers to be treated harshly. What a painful thing it is for a good man to be treated in this way.

God continues: "Twice my Son Jesus was set in place before spiteful or brutal men and treated like a fool. The night he was arrested, the servants of the high priest 'began to spit in his face and hit him. Others slapped him saying, "Play the prophet for us, Messiah! Who struck you?"' (Matt 26:67-68) The next day, Pilate's soldiers made him a crown of thorns and put a scarlet cloak around him. "Then they began to mock him by dropping to their knees before him, saying, "All hail, king of the Jews!"' They also spat at him and kept striking him on the head. (Matt 27:27-34)

"It was not enough to be taken prisoner, condemned and tortured. My Son had to suffer these insulting humiliations at the hands of menial people. 'Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart,' he told his disciples (Matt 11:29). Here was their lesson—and yours. Will you learn from it?"

Oh God, even when they had nailed him to the cross and he was helpless before them, they didn't give up, did they?

"No, the evangelist tells us that 'People going by kept insulting him, tossing their heads and saying . . . "Save yourself, why don't you? Come down off that cross, if you are God's Son". Even 'the chief priests, the scribes and the elders also joined in the jeering: "He saved others but he cannot save himself. . . . He relied on God; let God rescue him now if he wants to".' (Matt 27:39-43) Can you imagine any more scorn they could have heaped on my Son Jesus? After rejecting his teaching and having him crucified, they continue to pour out their insults against him".

Lord, thank you for making clear the painful humiliation that your Son suffered during his passion. Give me a share in his suffering and so let me offer some comfort to his Heart.

THE LORD OF GLORY

Lord Jesus, help me to understand how things changed after your resurrection.

“My friend”, Jesus says, “with my resurrection on Easter Sunday I experienced a quality of life far different from before my death. I could appear at will wherever I wished. My body was filled with the beauty of my spirit, as yours will be after the resurrection, and my Heart was radiant in its love and kindness. I appeared to about 500 of my disciples before returning to the Father, and then took my place in heaven, where I was glorified with the glory I have as the Second Person of the Trinity, but now with the full reality of my human nature”.

O Lord, we approach you now as the Lord of glory, and you speak to us in the splendor of your humanity. Your Heart is free of anguish and pain, it no longer suffers the humiliation of your enemies, it does not carry the awful burden of the sins of the world. You speak to us from glory now, and we have good reason to rejoice in the joy and expansiveness of your glorified Heart.

“Yet, never forget”, Christ says, “it is the same Heart that suffered so much pain. For, although I am crowned in glory, I am the same Jesus who endured my bitter passion. When you approach me now, you telescope the past with the present into one reality. This allows you both to compassionate me in my suffering and to rejoice with me in my glory.

Thank you, Lord. We are privileged to have in the scriptures such vivid accounts of your life, your passion and your risen life that we can easily relate today to the call of the apostles, the betrayal of Judas, the mandate to Peter as head of your Church, and your presence at the right hand of the Father--as part of an unbroken experience of your Heart. We are privileged in our prayer to enter at a particular moment in this history and sense its unity with all that went before and after. For it is always your Heart—the same loving, self-sacrificing, pained and glorified Heart that is at the center of our attention.

Make us vividly aware that, although you are clothed in glory, the Heart to which you invite us is the Heart that has suffered much because of our coldness and infidelity.

BROUGHT TO LIFE WITH CHRIST

We read in Ephesians: “You were dead because of your sins and offenses. . . . [We] deserved God’s wrath like the rest. But God is rich in mercy; because of his great love for us he brought us to life with Christ when we were dead in sin”. (Eph 2:1-5)

Paul saw us as brought back to life when Christ rose from the dead after his passion and death. We were raised from our state of sin. Christ’s resurrection gave life to us all, so great is God’s love for us.

God my Father, what does it mean to be *alive with Christ*?

God answers: “My friend, this is the condition of a person who, despite temptations, remains faithful to Christ after baptism. It is to be, and be able to act as, a son or daughter of God, one adopted into God’s family, where Christ is Son by his very nature. When you are alive with Christ, you know that he has shared his Spirit with you and you can act with the power and energy of that Spirit. You become a dynamic instrument of love as you live and work in the world”.

To be alive with Christ also means to have the ability to share Christ’s life, and the power of his love, with many others. This was Christ’s message to St. Margaret Mary: Tell others of the great love of my Heart. Ask them to give me their love, and to make up for others who are so cold and so afraid. Because Margaret Mary and St. Claude Colombiere and others like them were alive with Christ, because they lived in his love, they could be Christ’s instruments to ignite that love in other people. Through them, the Holy Spirit would conceive the spirit of Christ in the hearts of many others.

TO LIVE IN CHRIST

Lord Jesus, when you told your disciples that the person who eats your flesh and drinks your blood lives in you and that you live in him, you said further that he would draw life from you, as you have life because of the Father (John 6:56-57). You spoke about our living in you elsewhere too, using the image of the branches that are part of the vine and draw life and vigor from the vine.

Father, what does this mean? What does it mean, not just to be alive with Christ, but to *live in Christ*? This must be a unique spiritual union, a reality of the spirit, unlike anything we can see or touch, something perceived by faith and realized in the depth of our mind and heart.

God says: “Living in Christ means to share his spirit most intimately; to be alive through Christ; to be led at all times by the Spirit of Jesus; to live, as Jesus lived, by love. To live in Christ is to be totally alive, to have no part of you that is not fired by love. It is to give Christ a chance today to live once again in this world, through you. It means allowing yourself to be driven by the powerful force of Christ’s love”.

“The love of Christ drives me on”, Paul said (2 Cor 5:14). For him, experiencing God’s mercy and saving grace meant *living in Christ*. He went so far as to say: “To me, ‘life’ means Christ”. (Phil 1:21). He identified so closely with Christ that he said: “The life that I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me” (Galatians 2:20)

To live in Christ, and for Christ to live in us, is to be so intimately united with him that we share our lives together, and that we draw life from Christ. If we draw life from Christ, we also draw his love, for love is at the very heart of the reality of Jesus. Drawing life and love from Christ

gives us incomparable strength, fires us into new men and women, makes us living images of Christ.

Lord, you made it clear that you nourish this life through the Eucharist (Jn 6:53-58). Give me a powerful faith and a strong desire to draw strength and power from you each time I am privileged to receive your Body and Blood.

Jesus, when you go on to compare this to the way you draw life and strength from your Father, we realize more fully the power of our union. This is what drove St. Paul to the ends of the known world to preach you, and finally to die for you in Rome. It impelled saints like John Brebeuf to suffer terrible torments--for your name, Jesus, a name which he cut into the trees in the land of the Huron Indians. It was the powerful motive force behind the life of St. Ignatius Loyola, and Mother Teresa, and Pope John XXIII.

Lord, give me a deeper faith so that I will want to draw this kind of love from my union with your Heart and make it possible for you to share your life with many others whose lives I touch.

PREDESTINED TO BE GOD’S ADOPTED SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavens!
God chose us in him before the world began,
to be holy and blameless in his sight,
to be full of love;
he likewise predestined us through Christ Jesus to be his adopted sons—
such was his will and pleasure—
that all might praise the glorious favor he has bestowed on us in his beloved. . . .
In him we were chosen; for in the decree of God,
who administers everything according to his will and counsel,
we were predestined to praise his glory by being the first to hope in Christ.
In him you too were chosen;
when you heard the glad tidings of salvation, the word of truth, and believed in it,
you were sealed with the Holy Spirit who had been promised.

So we read in Ephesians (1:3-12). Father, this mystery of divine choice astonishes me. To be chosen, in Christ, from all eternity—that is almost beyond my comprehension. “Chosen . . . to be holy and blameless in his sight”. Why me? Before time began? It is certainly a mystery hidden in the mind and heart of God, meant to bring me into the family of God. It is too much; it is overwhelming. It is clearly the way love works, never stopping to measure, going beyond all reasonable bounds. But I ask: Why me?

God answers: “I chose you to be holy because you are in Christ, who is all holy, and he is in you. You cannot be in Christ without being holy. To be holy and blameless in my

sight means to be filled with love, as Christ is filled with love. For love drives out selfish ambition, which is the root of sin, and makes you holy, like me.

“Besides that, I chose you to be my son (or daughter). I loved you enough to adopt you into my family, a family inspired by the love of Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit. I did this freely so you would realize how much I love Jesus and want to show him my favour by increasing his progeny”.

For those who have been chosen to be members of God’s family and are predestined to give glory to God by placing their hope in Christ, the Spirit is the pledge of their inheritance. God’s gift of the Spirit is the seal upon our incorporation into the family of God. We can only thank God for favouring us so greatly and be filled with wonder at his choice.

WHO WILL SEPARATE US?

Lord, I know you have called us to be your sons and daughters. You reach out to us in love and make us part of your family. We call upon you as Father and we live in close union with your Son Jesus. But I am fearful sometimes. The world around me invites me to share its pleasures. Satan is eager to upset your plans for me. Even my friends wonder why I am different from them. I want to be faithful, Lord. I don’t want to reject your love. I don’t want to disappoint you. But I am concerned.

God says: “Do you think when I called you that I would let go of you so easily? Is it possible that, once I handed over my own Son to save you, I would not give you all the blessings you need to remain faithful? (cf. Romans 8:31-32) Christ himself pleads for you. Am I going to deny him?”

But, Lord, there are so many things that stand in my way—forces much more powerful than myself. I know how much you love me, but how can I stand up in the face of so many temptations? I fear I may lose you completely.

God says: “My son, I know the power of these forces that threaten you and make you anxious. I know them because they are all under my power. I made them; they are only my creatures. Don’t you realize they are in my control? You must not be fearful, because I understand how weak you are, and I am here to help you to stand firm. You must trust in me.

“Do you think I want to condemn you? My servant Paul asked: ‘Who will bring a charge against God’s chosen ones? God, who justifies? Who shall condemn them? Christ Jesus, who died or rather was raised up, who is at the right hand of God and who intercedes for us?’” (Rom 8:33-34)

Lord, you have inspired a great love in my heart. But love can be fickle and my enemies can draw me away from you.

God responds: “Don’t you believe it! Because this love comes from me and I have chosen you, never fear that you will lose it. St. Paul said with great confidence:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ?

Trial, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger,
or the sword? ...

In all this we are more than conquerors because of him who has loved us.

For I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities,
neither the present nor the future,

nor powers, neither height nor depth nor any other creature

will be able to separate us from the love of God

that comes to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord”. (Rom 8:35, 37-39)

Lord, my heart is at peace. Give me this confidence in your abiding love and I will not give way to anxiety.

MY CHOSEN INSTRUMENT

After you appeared to Saul, Lord, you referred to him as your chosen instrument (Acts 9:15). Suddenly all the forces of his powerful personality were released for him to preach the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles. He was absolutely freed of any fear or uncertainty, hesitation or delay in pursuing his call. He was totally at your disposal. Nothing could stop him.

Lord Jesus, I find myself holding back from that absolute dedication I see in St. Paul. I am bogged down by a hundred different things I feel I have to do, troubled by my guilt over important duties left undone, balked by fear of my ineptitude and possible failure. Lord, free me from my fears. Let me break loose from the anxieties and ties that constrain my freedom and spontaneity, so I am totally at your call. I want to soar like the eagle. What do I need to set me free?

Christ says: “My son (or daughter), give me your heart. Let me touch it with the fire of my own Heart to set it ablaze with zeal for your calling. You recall that I said, ‘I have come to light a fire on the earth. How I wish the blaze were ignited!’ (Luke 12:49) I could not rest until I had brought the Good News to all those who depended on me. You know how eager I was to move from town to town to preach the coming of God’s kingdom into their lives.

“That’s the spirit I want to see in you, if you are my disciple. Today you are that fire I came to light on the earth. Forget your fears, rise from your laziness. I don’t want any half-hearted men or women in my service. Since I called you to help me, we are yoked together (cf. Mt 11:29-30). If you fall behind, our work together will suffer. What you have to do for my people can’t be done as well by anybody else. I am counting on you, and many other people are, too.

“Does this seem too much to ask of you? Maybe you forget that you’re not doing it alone. You have my help. St. Paul knew he could do all things in God who strengthened him (Phil 4:13). He said that God chooses the weak to shame the strong (1 Cor 1:27). If you feel weak, ask me to give you the energy you need”.

Love was the driving force in St. Paul’s life. He drew all his strength from his love for Christ. He could draw this strength daily from the Heart of Jesus, for he said our lives must be rooted and grounded in love (Eph 3:17). Like Christ, he was constantly impelled by the Spirit, who had poured the love of God into his heart (cf. Romans 5:5). The Spirit drove him incessantly. When we begin to slacken in our service of Jesus, we must ask the Spirit of Jesus to drive us on to serve as Jesus served (cf. Matt 20:28). For we too are his chosen instruments.

MY BELOVED SON

Lord, thank you for giving us your beloved Son Jesus. Here is the One who can worship you perfectly in spirit and in truth. He said to the Samaritan woman: “You people worship what you do not understand, while we understand what we worship”. (John 4:22) Of course, your Son understands. You sent him forth into our world from your divine presence, a man like ourselves, to raise his human mind to you, to submit his entire will, and so give you perfect praise. He is the supreme voice of all mankind, the perfect spokesman. He worshiped you in spirit and in truth as he hung dying on the cross, and does so every day in the Mass. You listen to him; he is your beloved Son, and our perfect brother.

Good Father, your Son, who understands your greatness and worships you in spirit and in truth, also knows your great goodness and loves you perfectly. You have given him a human Heart, one like our own but with an endless capacity for love, for it is cast in your own likeness; it is a mirror of your love. My own heart is so narrow, Lord, so pinched and futile in opening to your love, like a shriveled plant exposed to the brilliant sun. But here is One who knows you in the richness of your love, and returns that love in the perfection of a human Heart.

Lord, what do you want me to understand? Where are you leading me? Help me to sense the greatness of this mystery.

“My son (my daughter), Jesus came to rescue an entire world from its wretchedness and sin. But I sent him also to give me perfect praise and the fullness of human love. Despite the prophets and the holy people I sent, even his own pure Mother, no one could render me the love of which Jesus was capable. In him the whole human race was at last able to love me perfectly. Learn from him what perfect love is. Draw from his Heart the model and the practice of absolute self-giving, total surrender of yourself to me, in the likeness of Jesus”.

God continues: “In his Heart you will also find the perfect example of love embracing the world around you. His Heart went out to every person he met, even as my love embraces every creature. Let this perfect human Heart be a model for your heart in working among people. He worked with great intensity. He came to cast fire upon the earth. Let him inspire you to want to do the same.

Thank you, Lord, for letting me understand better what you meant when you looked down on Jesus and said, “You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests”. (Mk 1:11)

THE WAY TO CHRIST’S INNER LIFE

Lord Jesus, many saints have entered in spirit into your Heart, there to find rest and renewed strength. Some have been drawn to enter mystically through the wound in your side, from which flowed blood and water, a sure sign that the centurion’s spear had reached your Heart. You invite me to come to your Heart and find there the door to your whole interior life.

Christ says: “Come, draw near. Let me take you to myself”.

Once we have entered through Christ’s Sacred Heart into the life of his spirit, we discover undreamed of riches--the entire array of virtues that form that unlimited treasure of which St. Paul speaks (Ephesians 3:8). There to one side, first of all, we see the jeweled radiance of his *mercy*, overwhelming in its brilliance. Streams of forgiveness flow out to people everywhere, through all ages, in every part of the world and every condition of life.

I look at another side and see the golden brilliance of Christ’s *humility*, a deep consciousness of his human limitation before the Father, the subjection of his entire will to the Father’s wishes. Near to this is the *gentleness* of Christ, that made him so attractive to people and allowed his enemies to lead him like an innocent lamb to the slaughter.

We look again and see his immense *compassion* for the poor and the troubled, for those who hunger for bread or human affection, his concern for the sorrowing and empty-hearted. As we proceed further, we find a broad display of his *generosity*, his total self-giving to God and his immense goodness to us. He laid down his very life to save us so we could live with God our Father.

We move on and see the brilliant radiance of his *kindness*, his *patience*, his *great-heartedness*, his *filial devotion* to his Father, and every other virtue that filled his spirit.

In the midst of all this, Christ makes us aware of the all-pervading spirit of his *love*. “Yes”, he says, “love is both the source and the culmination of all my virtues. In the love of my Heart you will find the fullest possible expression of my devotion to the Father and my deep, personal dedication to every person on earth”.

Discovering the love of Christ's Heart, and moving from there into his whole inner life, we understand the dynamic force behind his entire life and all that he says and does. It is true after all that "Love says it all".

OF HIS FULLNESS

"Of his fullness we have all received". So writes John (1:16), summing up the experience of the early Christians when God shared his very being with them in giving them his son Jesus. God invites each of us to experience this fullness of his gift in Christ Jesus, even though we often back away from the opportunity to share it completely. It is like standing under a great waterfall and moving back to avoid being overwhelmed by the cascading waters.

Yet God's outstretched hand always beckons. Christ says: Come to me and I will refresh you. He offers us a fuller life, a richer share in his divine life: "I came that [you] might have life and have it to the full", he says (John 10:10). He speaks of life-giving water that flows out of himself into those who believe. It becomes a spring of living water in his followers for the enrichment of others (cf. John 7:37-39).

Lord, it is clear that this fullness consists of the outpouring of your love for us in Christ Jesus. You have lavished your love on us in overwhelming abundance by giving us your very Son. Now you want us to draw fully from the abundant life he offers.

Good Father, you have expressed this love for us physically in the Heart of Jesus. Here is the source of that living water for which all of us long. From your Son's Heart comes an abundance of grace and truth that has made us your sons and daughters, friends of Jesus whom he invites to share in a richer life by drawing from the wellsprings of his love. He says: Drink deeply of this living water. It is an inexhaustible spring of grace.

How do we know that we can draw from the fullness of life in the Heart of Christ? John makes it clear that those who believe in Jesus have been adopted into God's family—as his sons and daughters. (John 1:12-13) As God's own children we share his very being, live in his presence, draw strength from his Spirit. Once he has drawn us into his family, will he not give us all other gifts besides? Once he has given us Jesus, does he not expect us to draw fully from this great treasure of Christ's love?

Lord, you know that we often turn our backs on your invitation. Your Son came among his own and his own did not receive him. They did not welcome his coming into their cozy lives to disturb their easy and settled ways. Jesus does not invite us except at the cost of forsaking our contented paths and entering his world. It is a price that may seem too painful to pay. Who would risk everything for such an uncertain experience?

God says: “My son, if you are courageous enough to welcome my invitation, I am ready to draw you into the richness of my divine life, so that you too may share in the fullness of my love in Christ Jesus. I will draw you to him with my irresistible power and strength. I await only your word”.

Christ said to the woman at the well: If only you had recognized God’s gift, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. (John 4:10) Father, give me the courage to ask your Son for this life-giving water and not turn away in smallness of heart. Then, I beg of you, you can let me share in the fullness of your love.

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