

JOINT PASTORAL LETTER
OF THE BISHOPS OF THE ANTILLES EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE
On
DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,

We, the Bishops of the Caribbean, want you all to know that we too are aware of the need for changes to be made in our regions, that justice may be done. We trust that you, like us, will do your best, as far as you are able, to co-operate in all the efforts that are being made to promote the good of our Caribbean peoples. We believe that as Catholics it is our duty to be in the forefront in initiating change in the social, economic, and political fields to serve justice.

Basis of Change – Spiritual Renewal

At the same time, we are aware that the basis of all EFFECTIVE change is a spiritual renewal of ourselves. In vain will we make changes in **things** if we do not make corresponding changes in **persons**. What Paul wrote to the Colossians we can read as addressed to us, the peoples of the Caribbean:

"I would bring courage to their hearts; I would see them well ordered in love, enriched in every way with fuller understanding as to penetrate the secret revealed to us by God the Father, and by Jesus Christ, in whom the whole treasury of wisdom and knowledge is stored up." (Col. 2: 3)

New Covenant

We Christians know that God has made a covenant with us as he did with the people of Israel. We, too, will be made into a great people if we are faithful to the promises we committed ourselves to in that covenant. Our covenant with God is made through CHRIST, and it is a covenant of LOVE.

Commitment to Christ

We write this joint pastoral letter on the occasion of the third centenary of Our Lord's appearance to St. Margaret Mary, and his request for a Feast in honour of His Sacred Heart. The Feast of the Sacred Heart should remind us that we are committed to Christ, and that it is through love of Christ that we shall find the renewal we seek. Is it not through Christ that we have made our covenant with God the Father? And is it not Christ who will lead us to our promised land? He is a leader we can trust, for our relationship with Christ is not one of fear but of LOVE.

This commitment to Christ, and an awareness of Christ's love for us, is as old as Christianity itself. Listen to St. John in his gospel:

"Indeed, from his fulness we have, all of us, received – yes, grace in return for grace, since, though the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ." (John 1: 16-17)

The new spirit of love and friendship brought into our relationship with one another, and with God, through the outpouring of love and affection by Jesus, is evident throughout the writings of the Church Fathers. It is witnessed by the early Christians of whom a non-believer exclaimed: 'See how they love one another!'

Devotion to the Sacred Heart

Private devotion to the Sacred Heart is found among several saints of the Middle Ages, as for example, St. Francis of Assisi. But it was the appearance of Our Lord to St. Margaret Mary that extended this devotion to the Church at large.

We must understand that it is to the PERSON of Christ that we turn. The symbol of the heart helps us to feel the warmth and actuality of the love of Christ for us His love is not an abstraction. The heart of Jesus is human and divine. Christ is God, and at the same time the most human of men.

The Sacred Heart and the Caribbean

The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is universal, for Christ died for love of us all. But the expression of **our** love should be peculiar to us. In other words, we in the Caribbean would like to communicate our love in words and songs that have our own resonance, in images and colours that harmonize with our living and our lands. The rich content of the West Indian personality can give a very personalized response to the outpouring of the love of Christ.

It is widely felt that this devotion, so ideal for a world ever more eager for love, has suffered much in the past century from a lack of taste in some of those who have popularized it. What a wonderful service would be rendered if artists and poets could be found to express what St. Paul puts so well in words:

'It is not easy to die, even for a good man - though of course for someone really worthy, a man might be prepared to die - but what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.' (Romans 5: 7-9)

There is nothing sickly sentimental about these virile words of St. Paul. Can our artists and poets capture the same virile love? If they could paint pictures that could be hung in every Caribbean home, how many would be inspired by the noble self-sacrifice of the love of Christ! If hymns and poems could be written which express the manliness and nobility of Jesus' love for us, they would bring inspiration to old and young alike.

A Devotion for Action

If in this Holy Year of Reconciliation, we can renew and enliven our devotion to the Saviour's Sacred Heart, "no force whatever, neither the height above us nor the depth beneath us, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which comes to us in Christ Jesus, Our Lord." (Romans 8: 38)

We must not remain passive, inactive, complacent, for Christ has said: "I have come to spread fire on earth, and how I wish it were blazing already." (Lk. 12: 49)

Reparation

The dynamism of love generated by the Sacred Heart in us will lead us to make amends not only for our own personal offences, but for those of others. Galvanized into action, we, like Christ, will go about doing good. Such a fire of love set alight throughout our lands would soon burn down the walls of injustice and purge our lands of the evil stench of sin.

Two Kinds of Love

As there are two kinds of cassava, one bitter, one sweet, so there are two kinds of love: one leading to God, the other leading away from him. The bitterness experienced in so many of our families comes from the wrong concept of love. With true love, husband and wife relate well with each other, as needle and bobbin form an intertwining thread through a piece of cloth; their children are not neglected, still less abandoned. Such parents approach parenthood responsibly, and if necessary, after prayer and through self-control, space the birth of their children. They take upon themselves the education of their children for life. They explain simply and candidly the creative role of parents and the sacredness of sex. The example in such homes prepares the young people for their own vocation in life, whether it be the married state, or that of the priest or religious. Family prayer is in the rhythm of life; the Bible a family book; the love of Christ a presence in the home. Such a family needs only to put into words the consecration they have already made of their home.

Work and Wealth

Because of our covenant with God, we must seek justice for our people. Every man has a right to earn a wage sufficient for the upkeep of his family. We must all tackle the problem of unemployment. Productivity is not by itself the measure of economic wealth. If our goal were production alone, the only result would be more production. Our goal must be the growth of happiness in our community and the spread of mutual love and respect based on the teaching of Christ.

Much of our economy is based on the minerals and products of our land and the harvests from our seas, sugar, bauxite, bananas, citrus, sea foods, coconuts, and spices.

We depend on the sale of these products, but the position of provider should not put us in a position of inferiority. We believe in a theology of **SERVICE**, not servitude. We are integral parts of the body of Christ. Each part in the body has its special function and each part has its dignity. Through our understanding of the love of the Sacred Heart we recognize that we are all adopted sons and daughters of God, Our Father.

"If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you... I tell you most solemnly, no servant is greater than his master."
(John 13: 14-16)

Revolution of Love not Hate

There is the spirit of the new age; that is the revolution that must take place among us, and it is based not on hatred but on the love of Christ.

Many of us in the Caribbean cannot trace our roots beyond a few generations because our forebears were forcibly brought here. But let us not live forever brooding in hate. That attitude will enslave us afresh, and this time our souls will be enslaved, and it will be our own doing. If the mind that is in us, is the mind of Christ, we must know a better way – a victory for justice through love.

Our Role

A world-wide victory through love could be started right here in our Caribbean. Is not the Caribbean man a recapitulation of many races – are we not a veritable united-nations. If we can weld a true unity and brotherhood among ourselves, we would set a pattern to the world. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is one sure way to this better world.

Hope in Youth

To our young people especially we recommend the leadership of Christ through love. Christ is the **IDEAL** for youth. He is the answer to the struggle against the modern evils of free love, broken homes, violence, drugs, and blasphemous language. It is not true

that youth is responsible for the evils of our modern living – what is true is that youth is the answer – youth allied with Christ can dam up the torrents of vice.

Practical Measures

Among the practices associated with the Sacred Heart are:

1. The Apostleship of Prayer with the morning offering: "I offer you all my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart."
2. The Consecration of the Family to His Sacred Heart.
3. Acts of Reparation through prayer and penance.
4. The first Friday set aside for extra devotions to the Heart of Jesus.

We need to update the prayers used in some of these devotions, and to bring them more fully into line with the liturgical life of the Church. (This is certainly a task for the Episcopal Commission on Liturgy.) With a new image, new expressions, a deeper study of Christ in the Bible, the love of Christ will set the Caribbean alight with His burning love.

Then we shall be Christians deeply concerned about the people around; we shall see to it that the social pattern of living allows everyone to be a **REAL PERSON**. We shall bring to all the mystery of **CHRIST** – the mystery of **HIS LOVE**, pressed down and flowing over.

In conclusion, we invite you to say the prayers which follow on a Sunday in June, preferably the Sunday following the Feast of the Sacred Heart.

With best wishes and blessings in the Lord.

Sincerely and devotedly yours in Christ,

The Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference

08 June 1975

PRAYER

Jesus Christ, our Saviour, our Brother, and our Leader,
we, the people of the Caribbean, wish to renew our commitment to you, and to make
our own, all the intentions of your Sacred Heart.

(The response: **Jesus, We Thank You**)

For all the graces and blessings we have received from you, Lord, **R.**
For choosing to live among us as one of us, **R.**
For showing us the dignity of work, and especially manual work, **R.**
For identifying yourself with the poor and the oppressed, **R.**
For taking on yourself burdens and problems like our own, **R.**
For the forgiveness of our sins won for us by your Passion and Death on the Cross, **R.**
For letting your Mother Mary be our mother, too, **R.**
For accepting us as your brothers and sisters through the gift of your life in Baptism,
R.
For giving yourself to be the food and drink of our souls, **R.**
For continuing to help us at every point of our lives through the sacraments, **R.**
For sending your Holy Spirit to enlighten and encourage us, **R.**
For the help you now give us to establish ourselves as an independent people proud
to serve under the banner of your Sacred Heart, **R.**

(The response: **We Promise You Jesus**)

In return for all the treasures of your love opened to us, we wish to make our promises
to you:

That each day we will offer ourselves, and all that we do to you, **R.**
That we will consecrate our homes and families to your Sacred Heart, **R.**
That we will work hard, and spend ourselves doing good following the example of your
life, **R.**
That we will spread your message of love and peace by lives of service, honesty, and
integrity, **R.**

That we will do all in our power to foster unity among our peoples, and to put an end to racial and class strife, **R.**

That we will make reparation for our sins, and for the sins of the world, **R.**

LET US PRAY: God our Father, in making this commitment to your son, Jesus, we know that of ourselves we shall be unable to honour it. We, therefore, beg you, through the love of your Son's Sacred Heart, to give us the help and the spiritual support we shall need. This we ask of you, God our Father, through your Son and the Holy Spirit. **AMEN.**

