**The Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus**

I remember, when I was a younger Jesuit, having an "allergic" reaction to the very Catholic and Jesuit devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.  When I was a child, a very dear Jesuit friend of our family gave us the traditional picture to the left, and it hung in our house all of my parents' lives.  I think my reaction had more to do with my "pastoral" fear that people would be turned off by the "traditional devotion" and so I just ignored the Sacred Heart and this feast day.

Over the years, I have more humbly come to see that the power of any devotion has to do not so much with its "relevance" in terms of contemporary culture, but in relation to how much I need an experience of God's love.  I suspect that historically most devotions (the rosary, the stations of the cross, novenas) came into being at a time when the Eucharist was less available and unable to serve the needs people had for an experience of God's love.  And, I find today, that all of my needs to experience God's love are not met by celebrations of the Eucharist today.  At times, it takes personal rituals, or personal reflections leading to talking heart-to-heart with my Lord, to really touch me deeply with the reality that love is not about my love for God, but God's love for me.   
  
When I pray - that is, when I spend time with Jesus, friend-to-friend, I need to have some "image" of Jesus.  I think we all struggle with that "face of Jesus" that we have in our imagination.  We want that face to be "human" and "real."  Though I don't have the same definite face of Jesus all the time, there are two aspects of my time with Jesus that seem to fit with this feast day.  I know Jesus loves me, and I know that love is passionate.

Today, the image of Jesus showing me his *Heart* really touches me.  In recent years, I have come to know what it means to love passionately.  I simply loved giving myself away when I was serving in a parish.  And I watched my mother's passionate, self-sacrificing love for my father as she cared for him 'til the day he died.  She is my clearest example of a heart on fire with love.  And I know more deeply what it means to have my heart broken, or to feel it penetrated by the cross, as I experience grief at my mother's death, or experience the pain of the struggle of our church with sexual abuse and years of bad decisions.  Today, I understand "suffering love" more than ever before.

So today, when we might be tempted to get self-absorbed by our difficulties and sufferings, it is wonderful to pause for a moment and hear Jesus' invitation to come to him and be refreshed.  It is wonderful to remember his love, which is passionate and compassionate.

*Thank you, dear Lord, for your love for me, for all of us pilgrim people.  Please today, let me know the fire of your heart's love for me.  Let me come to you today, come to be drawn into your meek and humble heart.  Let me learn from you, and find the "rest" you promise.  And, please, Lord, if it be your desire, set my heart on fire with love for those to whom you send me.  Let my care for others be full of passionate zeal and humble compassion.*

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