

THE SACRED HEART: Revisited

Fr Tony Kelly CSsR 11 June 2021 0 Reading Time: 4 minutes



We approach the Sacred Heart of Jesus by first acknowledging the sacredness of every human heart. In the innermost depth of everyone, beyond the masks and mirrors, the roles and images, the scripts and routines of everyday life, a unique reality is hidden: the sacred centre; holy ground, known only to God

Before youth has lived up to its promise, long after age has diminished beauty, strength and competence, even in the debility and defacement of disease, even in times of disgrace and failure, love, only the love of parents and family, of spouses and friends, colleagues and the nameless number of those who care about us, know that uniqueness and treasure it. It radiates in a thousand relationships from the deep

centre of what and who we are, the inexpressible and ineffable, the heart, known and moved only by God

What each of us loves shows what's in the heart. Our best words come from the heart to reach others in a heart to heart conversation. In the heart there stirs the basic passion for existence and belonging, for to live humanly is to have a heart. Turned in on ourselves, the heart becomes a lump of stone: hard, heavy, cold and dead. In contrast, to be alive is to move, in a momentum of relationships, in hospitality and welcome. Through whatever love we receive and give, our hearts find their focus and home.

In all the vocabularies of life and work, the deep truth of the heart eludes any ready speech. On occasion, we can be stirred to an inexpressible tenderness on hearing the cadence of beautiful words, the winged melody of music and song, in the silence of contemplating art, nature, by the sudden inrush of peace and new hope, and in the presence of true goodness.

True, our hearts have learnt wariness, since we too often have given them away in a sad exchange. The heart often appears as the idiot point in us that must be kept hidden as a valueless liability in the calculating world of getting and achieving, and appearing as others need us to be. If the culture is heartless, our hearts may well be cautioned to live in silence. When naked power, violence, greed and lust are the stuff of the real world, our hearts lie hidden in a zone of apparent unreality, keeping their own secret; in the austere knowledge that nothing *here* is our home, that our only peace is not of this world. In the sacred reaches of the heart, we are already occupied by nothing that our world in its making and doing can deliver. Our hearts are forever pierced by the arrow of what might be, but is not yet.

Must we teeter our whole life long on the brink of the nameless? Does the universe and its Creator have a heartbeat like our own? Is there an Other to feel our questions, our struggles and suffer with our sufferings? Do our hearts really have reasons which superficial reason can never know?

There was a heart once that beat and prayed and felt our plight as no other. That heart, sacred beyond all others, lived in the heartland of life, spoke words of mercy for the broken hearted, and radiated the light and warmth of a new world in which hearts could expand to their true proportion. From it flowed the stream of life's real meaning. It drew us into a realm of limitless grace and mercy with the force of a love that not even the weight of the world's agonies, nor the fury of its evils, could resist.

From the heart of Jesus came words of one undivided love: 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself.' A heart for God meant a heart for everyone. 'Blessed are the pure in heart. They shall see God.' The love of the heart gives the only true vision. It is to see the truth of love. 'God is love, and those who love are born of God and know God.' (1Jn 4:11).

His heart is the place of the great connection. Our feeling for God and God's feeling for us share in one circulation of life to the full. Jesus felt with the heart of God, just as he felt the pain and anguish of our human struggles. In him, the great mystery dwelt, as God lived and suffered on the inside of our humanness. The Spirit 'of the love that moves the sun and the other stars' (Dante) had formed this heart that God might suffer our sufferings and be close to all. In the vulnerability of love, our poor human hearts are lifted into the great song of the universe. In his heart, all the mystery of God and all the travail of the universe are embodied.

We never forget that the sharp iron of the soldier's spear pierced his heart; that he died and was buried; nor that his last movement of his heart was in prayer: 'Father, forgive them'. Today, we live on the other side of what happened. The Gospel speaks of blood and water flowing from the pierced heart. It still flows, living water, an unquenchable spring, life to the full. Though he is no longer with us as he once was, his heart beats now in every time and space. In him, God has come out in favour of the heart's ways, and made him 'all heart', even though we do not see his face or hear his voice. But we can feel as he feels, and pray as he prays, and love as he loves: 'You have not seen him and yet you love him; and still without seeing him you are filled with joy so great it cannot be described' (1 Pt 1:8).