

The Sacred Heart of Jesus (B)  
(Hosea 11:1.3-4.8-9 / John 19:31-37)  
12.06.2015

The image of the open heart of Jesus speaks to us.  
I both see and hear this image of the open heart of Jesus addressing an invitation to us.

What I hear the Lord inviting us to do today is to dare to enter into the gently flowing stream of blood of water that, the gospel tells us, trickled forth from Christ's side.

The hymn-writer has each one of us implore *blood of our Saviour bathe me in your tide* and the hymn-writer goes on to have us ask *wash me with water flowing from your side*.

That stream of love which comes forth from the open side of Christ continues to reach out to us today.

The images of blood and water are strong ones.

They speak to us of the birthing experience.

We all came forth to life when the waters in which we were held in our mother's womb broke.  
We emerged into this world covered in the life blood of our mother.  
(Our own life blood came to us through her veins.)

It seems to me that what our contemplation of the compassionate heart of Jesus wants to lead us into, is nothing less than a new birth experience: the recognition that we are born again and again and again from out of God's love.

A child just born into life in this world is confided to his or her mother's arms to be cradled near to her heart.

That physical gesture is all about providing the child with an inner security.  
It is about giving comfort to the distressed infant and a deep sense of reassurance after the trauma of its birthing.

The infant is led to experience peace as he or she is held in love.

There is a great warmth of feeling in the mother's gentle embrace.

The one who has given birth to a child exudes a love that makes itself felt in the way the child is held.

The infant (a fragile, frightened, little creature at that moment) draws strength from the embrace in which it is cradled.

The newly discovered surrounding world is made feel a little safer, a less hostile environment.

In the gospel passage we have just read, the fourth evangelist shares with us how he saw the pierced heart of Jesus torn open on Calvary.

I can well imagine John thinking at that very hour of what he had experienced on the eve of this terrible event.

Surely, he must thought back to his having been held close to Jesus' heart and he leant upon His breast on the previous evening in the Last Supper shared.

At that graced moment John had surely heard the Master's heartbeat and experienced great security as he felt all the warmth of the Lord's love for Him emanate from Christ's Sacred Heart. John must have felt like a cherished little infant in that extraordinary scene at the Last Supper. The Beloved Disciple was secure and free enough to express his love for Christ before all the other disciples gathered round; and also to receive the expression of Christ's love afforded to him in the welcome he received as he posed that beautiful gesture of trust in the Master.

The memory of the Last Supper was doubtless still very present to John on Calvary. At the foot of the cross John must have come to understand things hitherto somewhat mysterious to him.

On Calvary's Hill the Beloved Disciple would have made sense of those words Jesus had spoken on the eve of His passion: *This is my body given for you. This is my blood (the blood of the new and eternal covenant) poured out, shed, for you.*

This leads me to suggest that in the moments of deep anguish and quasi-total incomprehension we encounter in life, at those times when we are plunged into darkness and just cannot understand the pain of suffering we or those dear to us are led to endure, what can help us traverse the seemingly impossible present reality is our memory of God's grace experienced in the past.

This is surely what helped John make his way through the pain of Christ's crucifixion.

I can well imagine how at Golgotha the thought of the graced moments of love shared with Jesus previously, in other situations, came back to John and provided him with an inner security.

Yes, I believe it can help all of us to remember the graced moments we have known in our lives when the going is tough.

When we feel exposed and vulnerable – as Jesus must have felt (and John too, of course) on Calvary's Hill – it is good for us to remember those graced moments when we were held in love and experienced security and warmth in an embrace shared.

Such thoughts can be particularly consoling for us when our hearts are torn open and we are, or so it seems to us, pulled asunder by suffering and pain, dislocated within.

In the light of today's gospel I dare to say that these very moments, moments of great suffering and pain, can become, and often are, real re-birthing moments in our lives.

Birth is never an easy experience: both mother and child suffer horrendously, but what joy and peace comes when the birthing has been lived through and new life emerges.

*The joy is great that new life has come into the world!*

The whole of John's gospel (including the death scene from John's passion narrative and the Risen Jesus' post-resurrection appearances) shows us how Jesus was a man of deep feeling and how He called forth from others a response to His deep feeling for them.

Just as Jesus had intense emotional experiences and dared to give expression to the depth of His sentiments (including and especially the deep emotion of His love for others), so we are called to dare to be as He was: people who dare to feel what is going on inside us and also around us.

The Lord calls upon us in Matthew's gospel to learn from Him in His humility of heart, revealed in the vulnerable emotional states Jesus dared to allow to transpire in His encounters with others.

Our Messiah is shown in the gospels very definitely not to have been an emotionally frozen

creature.

From a heart that was clearly easily moved for and by others, He calls out to us today and invites us to be like Him.

Looking down upon us from the cross, as they come to pierce His side with the lance, Jesus seems to say to us: *Look at me and learn from me.*

*Dare to be like me!*

*Dare to reflect my way of being!*

*Dare to love with all the suffering inherent to all true love.*

Jesus *felt*.

Jesus felt, because feeling is human and being fully human is not incompatible with being divine.

Indeed, it is the way to becoming fully divine, St Paul implies this in what he teaches us in chapter 2 of his Letter to the Philippians.

Christ's way of humanisation is what led to His being glorified.

As it was for Jesus, so it is for us.

We need to be humanised in order to be truly Christ-like and really godly men and women.

What Jesus lived on Calvary's Hill, He lived moved by merciful love and compassion.

It seems to me that this is what today's feast calls us to reflect: merciful love and compassion.

Without our reflecting these attitudes we are not being true imitators of Christ.

What the contemplation of the Sacred Heart says to us is that we cannot turn our Saviour into a stoic saviour and we should not turn ourselves into the stoically redeemed.

The Jesus we contemplate, His heart exuding blood and water, is a man full of tenderness, ready to allow that to be seen.

With Jesus as our model and John as our encouraging witness (this John who leant on the Master's breast), may we become more comfortable with the idea of letting ourselves feel whatever it is we feel and also with the idea of expressing, discreetly demonstrating, our emotions.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart emerged in a Church that had grown cold and harsh in its judgements and ways.

It saw the light of day at a time when there were those who denied the universal love of God, preferring to present an image of a God who was for an elite, the chosen few.

The essential message of this devotion of the Sacred Heart is very relevant for our own day and age when some are anxious to promote the image of a more exclusive Christian Church, reserved for some chosen few.

The Jesuits were among the great promoters of Sacred Heart devotion and still are.

The essential message of the mystery of God's love celebrated in this feast is very much that of our Jesuit pope, Francis.

He speaks much of God's mercy and His universal love.

He wants to promote a more welcoming, all-embracing Church, in the image of the first *ecclesia* Christ Himself gathered round Him in the gospels.

Let us be open to that message!

It is calling us to rebirth as Church in this day and age.

Called to rebirth may we dare to allow ourselves to be bathed in the blood and water which flowed and still flows from Christ's side.

May we see the Church as a mother called to hold us close, to comfort and console us, to nourish and sustain us.

May we dare to see our Saviour as One who cares for all people and who unashamedly shows His tender love for us – and who, without embarrassment, is always ready to welcome our tender love for Him.

In our hours of pain and suffering, when our hearts are torn open, let us think back to those graced moments of tenderness shared with those through whom Christ has shown us love, remembering that all true human love is nothing other than, nothing less than, a reflection of the Lord's own love for us.