

The Sacred Heart of Jesus

St Giles Reading, 11 June 2021



'We do not lose heart.' Those words of St Paul come from a part of a letter (2 Cor 4.16) where he is exploring for fellow Christians the most testing moments of Christian faith. Amidst any number of difficulties Christians are, he says, able to understand that 'light momentary afflictions' - however intense they might be - are 'preparing for us an eternal weight of glory' because we 'look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen' (v.17).

It flowed out of his deep conviction, based on experience, that God's love, expressed in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, will endure and prevail. 'We do not lose heart', are words of gratitude and joy.

That said, there are - and will be - times for most of us when faith falters, when our faith, or we ourselves, seem to be very fragile; we're knocked off course by the trials and failures and sufferings that life brings to us. When that happens, when faith ebbs and God's love in Christ appears to fade, we feel diminished, cut down, something seems lost. That is why we need each other; and we need to remember that we are not alone. There are times when all we can do is to rest in the shared faith of the Christian community; be somehow 'carried' for a while by the prayer and faith of brothers and sisters; be supported and encouraged by the Church.

At its root however, the *deep* reason why we do not loose heart is because God's Sacred Heart calls to our hearts. Indeed, any love we receive through our brothers and sisters, and through our priests, is the love of *His heart* reaching out to us through them - inviting us to come out of ourselves, to forsake our uncertainties, to trust in Him and, by following His example, to make of our hearts a gift of unlimited love like His.

On this feast we gaze *into* the heart of Jesus expired on the cross: His heart *opened* by the thrust of the soldier's spear. Jesus' heart was *opened*: that is, God's heart was opened. Nothing about God is now held back. God's rich gifts of mercy gush forth from it like a fountain. All that God is *flows* from that heart: the shepherd and teacher of mankind, our priest and redeemer, our journey and our journey's end. All God's manifold wisdom, says St Paul many times, wisdom which was hidden for ages in His heart, has now been lifted up and opened up for everyone to see and know and embrace (*Eph* 3.9; cf *Col* 1.26; *Rom* 8.29). Now, as the prophet Zechariah says, 'we look on Him whom we have pierced' (*Zech* 12.10), and only a few verses later he adds 'a fountain shall be opened ... to cleanse [mankind] from sin and impurity' (13.1). This is why we do not loose heart.

Every year on this day I am reminded of a beautiful image in one of St Bernard's sermons (61 on the Song of Songs). He likens the open heart of Jesus Christ, and the wounds in His hands and feet, to cracks and crevices in a rock face. 'Through those wounds', he says, 'the inner secrets of His heart are laid open.'

Where more clearly than in your wounds, Lord, does the evidence shine out that you 'are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love'? No one shows greater mercy than He who lays down His life for those who are judged and condemned.

Dear Friends, this feast openly assures us that not only are we loved with *Eternal Love*, but that it flows from a pierced *human* heart filled with all the fullness of God. Such a heart will *never* let us down, and *never* let us go. Close to *sinner*s such a heart knows the deepest point of human need; close to the *Father* such a heart knows the heights of human joy.

Throughout the Christian centuries this chorus of gratitude and joy has sounded, 'we do not loose heart!' Let us ask the prayers of all the saints who have ever given their hearts to God's, so that in the power of the Gospel may we continue to build everywhere the civilization of God's Sacred and open Heart.