

# The True Witness

AND CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

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## THE SACRED HEART.

Next Friday is the first of June; it is also the first Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi. Being the first day of the month specially consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the first Friday of that month, also the Feast of the Sacred Heart, it will be a day of very exceptional devotion. Although the devotion to the Sacred Heart is as old, almost, as the Church, still there are many Catholics who are not fully aware of its importance and its history. The heart is the great organ of the emotions; it is the center of all the human system; it is the source or fountain of that life which courses through every part of the body. In the Sacred Body of Our Divine Lord the Heart throbbed with a love inconceivable to man; that Heart was opened by the spear of the soldier and its crimson contents flowed out; it was also opened by the sharp point of human frailty, and the torrents of its blessings and graces gushed forth to deluge the spiritual world of man's life. The Stations of the Sacred Heart might be made in meditating upon the different and numerous revelations of Christ to His faithful servants, at divers epochs, regarding that grand devotion. The Rosary of the Sacred Heart might well consist of beads, each one marked with the name of some great Father of the Church or famous Saint, whose assertions regarding this devotion have been recorded.

Glance back, for a moment, over the history of the centuries. Tertullian reads the title of our salvation in the Sacred Heart. St. Cyprian sees the Church springing from that Heart in the out-pour of blood and water. St. Ambrose compares the flood of graces from that Heart to the perfume from odoriferous plants. St. Augustine says: "His side was opened, that is to say the door of life was opened to allow the sacraments and all the other graces to flow upon the world." Again he says: "Behold the purest of fountains gushing up in the midst of paradise." In a like strain is the Sacred Heart spoken of by St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil, St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Ephrem, St. Cyril, and other Fathers. Coming to the Middle Ages, we find St. Bernard exclaiming: "Thy Heart has been wounded, that the visible wound may reveal to us the invisible one of love." Imagine the pale and glorious inhabitant of Mount Alverno—sweet-spirited St. Bonaventure—in his ecstasy of love and devotion, crying out: "Oh, had I seen the lance that pierced the Heart of Jesus, thinkest thou that, once having entered, I should ever have come forth? No, no; I should have remained therein I should never

have been able, I should never have desired to leave that abode!"

In the silent cloisters of Clairvaux and Cîteaux the rays of this grand devotion formed halos around the bowed heads of the sons of St. Francis of Assisi, and illumined the pages of the learned disciples of St. Dominic. The Angel of the schools, St. Thomas, the mighty theologian, found the marks of salvation in contemplation of the pierced Heart of the Redeemer. The Blessed Henry Suso was called the Ecstatic Doctor, on account of his wonderful raptures in presence of the Sacred Heart. The Sublime Theologian, John Tauler, exclaims: "What more could He do? He has opened His own Heart for us to enter." But while each one of these great saints and teachers, in the early and in the middle ages, found a source of unending consolation in the adoration and contemplation of the Sacred Heart, they, however, did not dream of establishing over the world a special devotion in honor of that great, infinite, throbbing source of human salvation.

One day our Divine Lord appeared to St. Gertrude, and showing her His Heart, He said: "Behold my Heart; I wish it to be thy temple." From that day forward, in all her trials, temptations and difficulties found consolation and relief in the adoration of the Sacred Heart. The thirteenth century was dazzled by the wonders and revelations of the extraordinary life of St. Mechtilde; she, also, had visions of the Sacred Heart. In her own words she says: "If I should write all the favors I have received from the most amiable Heart of Jesus, it would make a larger book than my breviary." While St. Luitgard was entertaining a friend one day, Jesus appeared to her, and revealing His Heart He said: "Look, this is what thou oughtest to love, forsake the attractions of human love, and thou shalt find in My Heart ineffable delights." Again, there is that wonderful saint, who bore on her person the impress of the Redeemer's wounds; she who had for mission to lead the Pope from Avignon to Rome—St. Catharine of Siena. One day Christ appeared to her and said: "My daughter, I have thy heart, and I give thee Mine that thou mayest forever live in me." Yet St. Catharine of Siena never received any special mission to propagate the devotion to the Sacred Heart. No more did St. Magdalene de Pazzi, nor St. Catharine of Genoa, nor St. Margaret of Cortona, nor St. Rose of Lima, although each in turn was favored in a most exceptional manner by Our Lord and had visions of that boundless ocean of mercy and love.

The regular and general devotion to the Sacred Heart, as practised in the Church at present, dates back about two centuries and a half. It was to a saintly nun of the Visitation Order—Margaret Mary Alacoque—that this sublime mission was confided. She was a native of Lhauteour, in Verosvres, France, where she first saw light, in July, 1647. Having lost her father when yet a child, she was sent to the Poor Clares to be educated. Her life was one of toil, sacrifice, misery and contradictions. She translated toil into prayer, sacrifice into pleasure, misery into happiness, and contradictions into blessings from on high. As years rolled past she desired to become a professed religious, and her life of sanctity gained for her the exceptional privilege of many apparitions in which Our Lord conversed with her. The spirit that possessed her whole being so seized upon her life that she was warned to be careful lest it be an evil spirit that swayed her soul. But Jesus promised her that soon she would meet with a man who, comprehending her state of

soul, would unfold to her the mission that was to be hers. In 1670 Pope Clement X. proclaimed a jubilee after his elevation to the throne of St. Peter, and a member of the Order of St. Francis went to Verosvres to preach a series of sermons on the occasion. This monk put her in the way of understanding her vocation. In 1671 she received the holy habit, and in 1672 pronounced her vows as a member of the Visitation Order. Her devotion to the Sacred Heart was so great that it became thoroughly understood in the convent that if Sister Margaret Mary was wanted she was to be found in the chapel in presence of the Holy Sacrament.

Her mission was revealed to her in three distinct revelations. The first of these took place on the feast of St. John the Evangelist, December 27, 1673. According to her own account this was the first time that Our Lord showed her His Heart in all its beauty. He said to her: "I have chosen thee as an abyss of unworthiness and ignorance to accomplish so great a design, so that all may be done by Me." He had already told her of His desire to flood the world with the beams of love and of grace from His Heart. The second revelation took place in 1674; it was in June, on the first Friday of the month, and the Friday immediately following the octave of Corpus Christi.

Between the second and third revelations the convent was visited by the famous and saintly Jesuit, Father Claude de la Colombiere. It was he who penetrated the secret of Margaret Mary's life, and who decided her special mission for her. He told her to humble herself, to pray fervently, and to await the will of the Divine One. The next year, on the 16th June, 1675, the last and grand revelation took place. It was during the octave of the feast of the Blessed Sacrament that Our Lord suddenly appeared to her, and said: "Behold this heart which has so loved men that it has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming itself, in order to testify its love. In return I receive from the greater part ingratitude, by their irreverence and sacrilege, and by the coldness and contempt they have for Me in this sacrament of love. And what is more painful to Me is that they are hearts consecrated to Me. It is for this reason that I ask thee that the first Friday after the octave of the Blessed Sacrament be appropriated to a special feast, to honor My Heart by communicating on that day, and making reparation for the indignity that it has received. And I promise that My Heart shall dilate to pour out abundantly the influences of its love in all that will render this honor, or procure its being rendered."

It would be impossible for us, in the short space of an editorial, to go into the full history of Margaret Mary Alacoque's life and her labors in propagating the devotion to the Sacred Heart. Suffice to say that it gradually and then rapidly spread throughout the whole Church. In 1688, Charles de Brienne, Bishop of Contances, established the feast in his diocese. In 1694, Antoine Pierre de Grammont, Archbishop of Besançon, ordered its celebration. In 1719, Francois Villeroy, Archbishop of Lyons, wrote a pastoral on the subject. In 1720 the pestilence at Marseilles was checked by a solemn consecration to the Sacred Heart. In 1733, the devotion was established in Constantinople; in 1740, at Damascus and Aleppo; in 1709 it existed in Pekin; in 1743, a confraternity was established in the heart of the Chinese empire. In 1789 the Jesuit Fathers in America dedicated the Church of Conewago, Pennsylvania, to the Sacred Heart. The Popes granted in-

dulgences to all associations established for the propagation of the devotion. Pope Clement XIII., by a decree of February 6th, 1765, confirmed it, and on the 19th August, 1890, the present Pope Leo XIII. raised the feast—extended by Pius IX. to the Universal Church—to the rank of "a double of the first class." The Blessed Margaret Mary was solemnly beatified in Rome, on the 4th September, 1864.

In consideration of the exceptional circumstances of next Friday being the first day of June, the first Friday of the month, and the first Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi, we deemed it well to consecrate a somewhat unusual amount of space to the history and explanation of this wonderful devotion. For the amplification of the details given, we would refer our readers to a little prayer book recently published by Benziger Brothers, of New York, entitled "The Little Prayer Book of the Sacred Heart," which contains the prayers and practices, as well as the life of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque. It has been arranged by the Rev. Bonaventure Hammer, O.S.F., and should be in the hand of each one who wishes to aid in the propagation of the grand devotion to the Sacred Heart. Meanwhile our readers will remember that this devotion, which we have traced through the centuries, is to-day universal in the Church, and that the month of June is the one specially consecrated to its exercises. Untold rivers of grace does June conceal in its boundaries; on Friday they begin to flow for the world.

## IRELAND'S CAUSE.

The Freeman's Journal, of the 23rd May, contains the following:—

Justin McCarthy, last night, issued an appeal to the Irish people, saying it was impossible longer to withhold the fact that without immediate and generous financial aid Ireland could not hope to maintain for the remainder of the session the constant attendance of the Irish members. Their uninterrupted presence in the House of Commons is necessary to enable the Government to carry into effect its pledges to Ireland. "In the face of unexampled obstacles," the appeal says, "the friends of Ireland in the United States and Canada have subscribed in the most generous manner, but in view of the financial depression and for other reasons we cannot for some time count upon any large degree of assistance from abroad. It only remains, therefore, for us to appeal to our countrymen in Ireland. Without prompt response to this appeal, it will be impossible to prepare for the general election which cannot long be delayed."

These words of the Irish Parliamentary Party's leader are suggestive in several senses. In the first place, they are a grand acknowledgement of all that has been done, both in the United States and Canada, even under trying circumstances, to push forward the Home Rule cause. Secondly, they emphasize the fact—so frequently referred to in these columns—that material assistance is absolutely necessary if the Irish people ever hope to accomplish the great work of carrying on to a successful issue the gallant struggle of the last fifteen years. And, in a third place, they seem to sound a warning note regarding the probability of a general election in the near future.

A word with our readers upon each of these points. It is true that commercial depression and financial difficulties have greatly embarrassed our neighbors across the line, and even in Canada, while we have escaped similar disasters, proportionately to their means the Irish-Canadians have contributed most generously. Still we think that there is yet a possibility of more being done. If we rightly recall the words of Thomas Francis Meagher, in his Limerick speech, he