



The Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Crucifix: THE Christian symbols of love, welcoming and compassion

June 1, 2023

My dear Brothers & Sisters in Jesus' Sacred Heart,

It is a well-known and well-founded tradition that in our Catholic devotional life, each month of the calendar year focuses on a special devotion. For instance, the month of May is dedicated to the Blessed Mother, July to the Most Precious Blood, October to the Holy Rosary and November to the holy Souls of Purgatory.

June is dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and as we begin the month, I wish to encourage parishes, homes and schools and all other social & health care institutions throughout the Archdiocese of Toronto to welcome the opportunity to reflect on the profound and consoling meaning of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in our lives and walk of faith. Our Blessed Lord himself told us to learn from him for he is “meek and humble of heart.” (Mt. 11:29)

It is a visual image, a sign and symbol, that helps us dive more deeply into the personal love that Jesus has for each one of us. The heart is often considered the universal sign of love and there is no greater love than that which Jesus has given to each one of us. How can we imitate that love not only in the month of June but every day throughout the year?

The Sacred Heart of Jesus reminds us of our call to sacrificial, unconditional and generous love for others, for each member of the Body of Christ and the call for us to be the heart, the hands and the face of Christ to all those we encounter each day.

Pope Benedict XVI spoke beautiful words during an Angelus audience on June 1, 2008: “Every person needs a ‘centre’ for his own life, a source of truth and goodness to draw from in the daily events, in the different situations and in the toil of daily life. Every one of us, when he or she pauses in silence, needs to feel not only his or her own heartbeat, but deeper still, the beating of a trustworthy presence, perceptible with faith’s senses and yet much more real: the presence of Christ, the heart of the world.”

Images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus include a wounded heart, where we are reminded of the suffering experienced by Our Lord and his violent death. We see the crown of thorns, another sign of Jesus’ painful sacrifice and the knowledge that authentic love often includes wounds along the journey. The Cross of Christ is a symbol of both suffering and hope through the resurrection. We see the cross in churches, homes, schools, hospitals and social care institutions – it is a sign of welcome, love, acceptance and Christian outreach to our neighbour and those in need. Finally, the flames surrounding the Sacred Heart of Jesus



represent the Holy Spirit, bringing light through the darkness, igniting us to spread the Good News and share the love of Jesus, just as the first disciples experienced at Pentecost.

Saint John Paul II taught that: “From the Heart of Christ, man’s heart learns to know the genuine and unique meaning of his life and of his destiny, to understand the value of an authentically Christian life, to keep himself from certain perversions of the human heart, and to unite the filial love of God with love of neighbour.” (Letter of Pope John Paul II on the 100th Anniversary of the Consecration of the Human Race to the Divine Heart of Jesus – June 11, 1999)

These time-honoured symbols provide important opportunities for reflection devotion yet we are also called to live an authentic faith that acts in our daily Christian journey and is incarnate in the choices we make and the lifestyle we choose to embrace. This month, in a special way, let us remember the virtues of faith, hope and love in our interactions with all those we encounter. That our witnessing be prophetic and engaging.

In a moving passage on June 9, 2013, during an Angelus audience, our Holy Father Pope Francis, said: “And what is the fruit of this love? It is life! The mercy of God gives life to man, it raises him from the dead. The Lord is always watching us with mercy, always awaits us with mercy. Let us be not afraid to approach Him! He has a merciful heart! If we show our inner wounds, our sins, He always forgives us. He is pure mercy! Let us never forget this! He is pure mercy! Let us go to Jesus!”

Symbols carry meaning and are powerful in conveying truths and inspiring to action. For Catholic Christians the Crucifix and the Sacred Heart of Jesus are the authentic and unsurpassed symbols of love, welcoming and compassion.

I encourage our Catholic community to access the resources available at: www.archtoronto.org/sacredheart - these include prayers, reflections and activities appropriate for parishes, schools and families. We also draw on the beautiful pastoral letter, “Heart to Heart”, written in 2021 by Archbishop Emeritus Cardinal Thomas Collins.

I pray that this month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus will be one of particular grace and divine consolations for you and your loved ones. *Cor Jesu sacratissimum, miserere nobis.*

Sincerely Yours in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

Most Rev. Francis Leo
Archbishop of Toronto