

□ Reading time: 8 min.

On 24 October last, the Holy Father wished to renew devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the publication of the encyclical *Dilexit nos*, in which he explained the reasons for this choice:

“Some have questioned whether this symbol is still meaningful today. Yet living as we do in an age of superficiality, rushing frenetically from one thing to another without really knowing why, and ending up as insatiable consumers and slaves to the mechanisms of a market unconcerned about the deeper meaning of our lives, all of us need to rediscover the importance of the heart.”

We too wish to emphasise the value of this devotion, deeply rooted in the Salesian tradition. Don Bosco, inspired by the spirituality of St Francis de Sales, was keenly aware of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, promoted by one of St Francis' daughters, St Margaret Mary Alacoque, a Visitation Nun. This devotion was a continuous source of inspiration for him, and we propose to explore it in a series of future articles. Suffice it, for now, to recall the Salesian coat of arms, in which Don Bosco wanted to include the Sacred Heart, and the Roman basilica dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which he himself undertook to have built in Rome, spending time, energy and resources.

His successor, Blessed Michael Rua, continued in the founder's wake, cultivating devotion and consecrating the Salesian Congregation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In this month of November we wish to recall his circular letter, written 124 years ago, on 21 November 1900, to prepare for this consecration, which we present here in full.

‘The Consecration of our Pious Society to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Dear Brothers and boys,

For a long time and in many places I have been asked with great insistence to consecrate our Pious Society to the Sacred Heart of Jesus with a solemn and authoritative act. Especially insisting on this were our novitiate and studentate houses, united in a holy league, and the cherished memory of that unforgettable confrere of ours who was Father Andrea Beltrami. After a long delay, advised by prudence, I believe it appropriate to grant these supplications now, as the nineteenth century comes to an end and the twentieth century advances, full of

many hopes.

Already on many occasions I have recommended devotion to the most sacred Heart of Jesus to my boys and Salesian confreres, as well as to our Sisters, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and convinced that it would bring great spiritual benefits to each of us, last year I decreed that every Salesian should consecrate himself to him. These recommendations were well received by everyone; my requests were scrupulously carried out, and the benefits I expected were abundantly obtained.

Now I intend that each one consecrate himself anew, in a very special way, to this most sacred Heart; indeed, I desire that each rector consecrate the house over which he presides entirely to him, and invite the young people to make this holy offering of themselves, instruct them in the great act that they are about to perform, and give them the facility to prepare themselves appropriately for it. Christians can be told about the Heart of Jesus what Saint John the Baptist used to say to the Jews speaking about the divine Saviour: "There is one among you, whom you do not know." And in this regard we can also repeat Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman: "Oh, if you only knew the gift of God!" How much greater will be the love and trust our members and our youth feel towards Jesus if they are well instructed in this devotion!

The Lord has granted graces to each of us, he has granted them to individual houses; but he has been even more generous with his favours towards the Congregation that is our mother. Our Pious Society was and is continually blessed in a very special way by the goodness of Jesus, who sees how much we need absolutely extraordinary graces to shake our lukewarmness, to renew ourselves in fervour, and to carry out the great task that God entrusted to us: it is right, therefore, that our Pious Society be entirely consecrated to that most sacred Heart. Let us all together present ourselves to Jesus, and we will be dear to him as those who offer him not only every flower from their garden, but the garden itself; not only the various fruits of the tree, but the tree itself. Since, if he accepts the consecration of individual persons, he must deem the consecration of an entire community even more acceptable to him, for this is like a legion, a phalanx, an army that offers itself to him.

It seems that this is truly the time desired by divine Providence to perform the solemn act. The circumstance appears very favourable and opportune. It would seem beautiful and, I would say, sublime, in the moment that divides two centuries, to present ourselves to Jesus as expiatory souls for the wrongdoings of the one, and apostles to win over the other to his love. Oh, how blessed Jesus will then look kindly upon our various houses, which have become like so many altars

on which we offer the contrition of our hearts and our best physical and moral energies to him. How he will bless our Society, which gathers these scattered holocausts from around the world into one grandiose offering, to prostrate itself at Jesus' feet and cry out on behalf of his children: "Oh Jesus! Thank you, thank you; forgive, forgive; help, help!" And to say to him, "Jesus, we are already yours by right, having been bought by you with your most precious blood, but we also want to be yours by choice and by spontaneous, absolute consecration: our houses are already yours by right, as you are the master of all things, but we want them to be yours, and yours alone, by our spontaneous will; we consecrate them to you. Our Pious Society is already yours by right, since you have inspired it, you have founded it, you have brought it forth, so to speak, from your very Heart. Well, we want to confirm this right of yours; we want it, thanks to the offering we make to you, to become like a temple in the midst of which we can truthfully say that the Lord, master and king, our Saviour Jesus Christ dwells!" Yes, Jesus, overcome every difficulty, reign, rule among us: you have the right, you deserve it, we want it." These are the desires, the sighs, the intentions of our heart: let us seek to draw constant inspiration from them and to invigorate them in the love of God in this very special circumstance.

Therefore, dear friends, the great moment has come to make our consecration and that of our whole Pious Society to the divine Heart of Jesus, public and solemn. The moment has come to make the external and authoritative act, so much desired, by which we declare that we and the Congregation are sacred to the divine Heart. It is now necessary to establish some practical rules which can regulate this important function.

I intend, above all, that this solemn Consecration be prepared for by a devout three-day period of prayers and preaching which will appropriately begin on the evening of the Holy Innocents, 28 December, the day on which Saint Francis de Sales, our great patron, died.

I intend, secondly, that the act of Consecration be enacted by all together, young people, novices, confreres, superiors of every house, as well as by the greatest number of cooperators that can be gathered. Those among the confreres who find themselves outside their own community and cannot return, due to some circumstance, should make an effort to go to the nearest Salesian house and join there in this act with the other confreres. Those who cannot conveniently come to one of our houses should still carry out this consecration in the best way possible, as circumstances allow them.

Thirdly, I establish that this function shall take place in the church, on the night of 31 December as it leads to 1 January, precisely at the solemn moment that divides

the two centuries. You also know that for this year the Holy Father has stipulated that the Holy Mass may be solemnly celebrated with the Blessed Sacrament exposed at midnight on 31 December. Now, in our case it will be appropriate that when gathered in the church half an hour before, there be exposition of the Blessed Sacrament: and after at least fifteen minutes of adoration, all baptisms vows be renewed by everyone, religious vows also be renewed by the confreres, and then the consecration of oneself, one's house, and of all human society to the Sacred Heart of Jesus be done, following the form prescribed by the Holy Father last year. At that very moment, together with the Superior Chapter, using an appropriate formulary I will consecrate the entire Congregation.

After this, the Holy Mass shall be celebrated in every house, followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, preceded by the singing of the *Te Deum*, and by any other practices ordered by the Holy Father or by individual bishops for that occasion.

In the festive Oratories and wherever, due to any circumstance, it may not be possible or appropriate to hold this function at midnight, it can be done the following morning at the most suitable time, as the Holy Father has granted permission to have the Blessed Sacrament exposed from midnight until noon on the first of January, furthermore granting a plenary indulgence to those who, in the meantime, spend an hour in adoration there.

I would not want this Consecration to be a sterile act: it must be a source of great good to us and our neighbour. The act of consecration is brief, but the fruit must be imperishable. And to obtain this, I believe it appropriate to recommend some special practices to you, approved and commended by the Church, and enriched by many indulgences. While they will keep alive the memory of this great act, they will also serve to increasingly arouse this devotion in us, in the young, and in the faithful entrusted to our care.

I therefore propose that the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus be celebrated everywhere as one of the primary feasts of the year.

In all houses, let the first Friday of the month be remembered with a special ceremony, and let it be recommended to every confrere and young person to make a *Communion of Reparation on that day*.

Every confrere shall be enrolled in the association called the *Practice of the Nine Offices*, and truly strive to carry out the office assigned to him.

Every house should be associated with the confraternity of the *Guard of Honour*, and display its banner; and every confrere and young person should fix the special time at which he intends to do his guard duty, as prescribed by the said confraternity.

In the novitiate and studentate houses, those who can should observe the *Holy Hour* according to the established norms for practising this devotion. Since nothing can better contribute to making the above-mentioned act of consecration profitable, and to practising devotion to the Sacred Heart well than knowing what it consists of, I have compiled and herewith set out a suitable instruction. In this way, I hope that devotion to the most sacred Heart of Jesus will be more appreciated and desired by all of us and also by our good pupils. Intimately convinced that this solemn act which we are about to perform will be pleasing to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and that it will produce great good for our Pious Society, while I say farewell to you and bless you, I ask you again to join with me in thanking this Divine Heart for the great favours which it has already bestowed upon us, and to pray that the new century, while it will be a comfort and help to us, may yet be a century of triumph for Jesus the Redeemer, so that he, our dear Jesus, may reign in the minds and hearts of all people around the world, and that the *Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat* may soon resonate in the fullness of its significance.

Yours affectionately in Corde Jesu
Fr MICHAEL RUA

INSTRUCTION ON THE DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

Jesus, our most merciful Redeemer, having come to earth to save all people, placed in his Church an invaluable wealth of goods which were meant to achieve such purpose. And yet, not satisfied with this so universal and generous provision, whenever a special need was felt, he wished to provide even more effective aids to people. To this end, many divine solemnities were instituted little by little, certainly by inspiration of the Lord. To this end, the Lord raised up many shrines in every part of the world, and to this end, many holy religious practices were instituted in the Church, according to need.

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