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Sent: Friday, June 27, 2025 8:57 AM
To: Sydney Haus
Subject: Northland Catholic e-News - June 27th, 2025

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The Sacred Heart of Jesus: Where Love and Mercy Meet

One of the great gifts Pope Francis gave us in the final year of his life was an encyclical on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. **Pope Francis pointed out that the Church's teaching on the Sacred Heart is a "synthesis of the Gospel" (*Dilexit Nos* 83).** This is because it captures the truth of the Lord's human and divine love for us. If we come to understand the love of his heart, it changes us and enables us to love like him.

Jesus was God, and Jesus had a human heart. In the heart of Jesus is a deep love for you. Even now, he feels such profound love for you that he would die again for you — even if you were the only person in the world. Jesus desires to give himself to you, to share with you his heart.

Today, people sometimes forget that they have a heart. They live either completely in their intellect, seeking success above all, or in their passions and desires, pursuing daily pleasure or avoiding pain. But we are not merely intellects designed to think and achieve, nor are we just animals driven by emotion. We have human hearts. Our hearts are deeply connected to our souls. The heart is the very center of the human person. It is the place of choice within us, the place where we are most ourselves before God.

The heart, in a certain way, runs deeper than our intellect or surface-level emotions. It is the place where we encounter God. It is where we can give ourselves to another in love. It is where we can choose to make a covenant — a gift of ourselves, forever. When two people get married, they give their hearts to each other. This includes all of who they are: body and soul. It is a definitive commitment that outlasts the vicissitudes of emotion and becomes deep, lasting love.

Whenever the Bible speaks of prayer, it almost always speaks of the heart. It is the pure of heart who will see God (Matthew 5). As Pope Benedict XVI said: “The organ for seeing God is the heart. The intellect alone is not enough. In order for man to become capable of perceiving God, the energies of his existence have to work in harmony. His will must be pure and so too must the underlying affective dimension of his soul, which gives intelligence and will its direction... The heart — the wholeness of man — must be pure, interiorly open and free, in order for man to be able to see God.”

(Jesus of Nazareth, pp. 92–93)

If we want to draw close to God, we must allow our own hearts to be purified by the heart of Jesus. His heart loved all people. It hated sin and its effect on us. It felt deeply the sadness that sin brings. The heart of Jesus saw each person in their true dignity and was sorrowful over death, war, violence, and hatred — and filled with joy when people repented and chose mercy.

Our hearts are not free to love like Jesus because they are affected by our own sins and weaknesses. If we want to become like him, we must spend time getting to know his heart. We must learn to love what Jesus loved — and even to hate what Jesus hated. This is hard work. Growing in purity of heart begins with seeking freedom from sin. This happens through the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) and daily prayer.

Freedom from sin grows through constant exposure to his heart. As I seek to follow him daily and spend time in prayer, meditating on his Word, my heart begins to love what his heart loves. It will not happen without this effort! I will not be able to see God if I do not seek purity of heart.

Those who love his heart especially begin to love the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, the heart of Jesus is made so clear to us. Here is where he gives himself to the Father to pay the price for our sins. Here is where he gives himself to us in love so we can be united with him in Holy Communion.

How beautiful it is to receive Holy Communion worthily, with a pure heart. How many graces we receive when we do this! How beautiful it is to spend time in

adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Sometimes, in the quiet, you can almost hear the beating of his heart. Each heartbeat says your name. Each heartbeat speaks of how deeply he loves you.

Coming to know the love of the heart of Jesus is the most important thing in our lives. When we experience his love, we truly understand what it means to be loved unconditionally. All our sins are forgiven, and we begin to desire to live for him alone. We need this love of the heart of Jesus. We need to spend time with his heart in prayer so our own hearts can grow closer to his.

Perhaps this summer you could read Pope Francis' letter on the Sacred Heart.

Perhaps you could attend daily Mass once or more during the week. Perhaps you could spend time in adoration. No one who has ever trusted in the heart of Jesus has been disappointed. Draw near to his heart, and he will form yours and fill it with his own love.



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Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens

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