

When Sister Benita and I met to prepare for this evening's Vigil, we first looked at various images that artists tend to use for the Sacred Heart of Jesus. As with the image in our own rose window, most artists show the **heart** of Jesus exposed, unprotected, and perhaps with Jesus even beckoning us to do the same. But, do we? Do we risk exposing our hearts, our inner stirrings, our inner convictions? Do we risk exposing our vulnerable, unprotected, unguarded selves to each other and to the world around us trusting in God's divine guidance?

As we heard Father Xavier share with us several times this week, our relationships with each other and all of creation must have the foundation of personally experiencing the love of Jesus Christ. It is only from that foundation that we can build the Kingdom of God through our actions each day. It can be quite daunting to realize that the only way to fullness of life eternal in Christ is to allow Christ to live fully within and through us. To do so, we must first expose our hearts to receive Christ's unconditional love. But, we cannot stop there. To quote Fr. Xavier, "This mystical life we live is not just about us."

Tomorrow's second reading to the Ephesians reminds us of this very thing – that we are called to mission, to share the love of Christ with others through our actions. Not only must we first experience God's love for ourselves, but we also must accept that each member of this community is loved unconditionally by God with the same passion God shares with us. Only when we are able to recognize and truly accept that we are equally children of God, does our union in Christ Jesus, which is the heart of this Sacred Community, give witness to Christ's outpouring of love beyond this community.

Communal life is a challenge at times, but as St. Benedict shares in the prologue of the Holy Rule: "Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation." Sisters, we need each other on this journey. We help bring each other to our fullness in Christ by providing each other with opportunities to receive and to give Christ's unconditional love.

God's love for us is beyond our understanding. To help us try to grasp what is the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love, authors of Sacred Scripture apply human qualities to God's love. An example of this is in tomorrow's first reading from the prophet Hosea. Hosea gives human qualities to God's love for Ephraim reminding us of how we are called to respond to others with the same outpouring of love.

"Thus says the Lord, ...Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms and drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks; Yet though I stooped to feed my child, they did not know that I was their healer."

Although God did all these loving things for Ephraim, God's love was overlooked, ignored. Perhaps the human response would be anger or resentment, but this is where God shows divinity not humanity and says, "I will not give vent to my blazing anger, I will not destroy Ephraim again; for I am God and not a human."

This one example leads us to ponder a few questions. When my good intentions are rejected, taken for granted, or misunderstood do I rely on my human heart for a response, or do I strive to respond from the love of Christ that dwells within me? Do I give the love that I received from the Sacred One who gave His life for me so that I may live?

The Gospel reading from John reminds us of the Paschal Sacrifice God laid out before us. This passage gives us a vivid image of blood and water flowing out of Jesus' pierced side. Jesus' life-blood was poured out for you and for me. God sent us Jesus, the Son, that we might have life everlasting. There is no greater love than this.

I close with words of blessing and encouragement as spoken by St. Paul to the Ephesians, "May God strengthen you inwardly... May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may charity be the root and foundation of your life."

Sisters, may we not be afraid to expose our hearts to each other and to the world around us. In doing so, we will draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation....the Sacred Heart of Jesus.