



The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ: 19th June 2022
Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“In the Eucharist the Heart of Jesus beats for us still”

I am especially blessed to be writing my Reflection for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Eucharist on the occasion of beginning the Novena of Masses leading to the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, at Maryvale, where the first public Chapel of the Sacred Heart in England is to be found. It is a place of prayer and strength for the mission we all have of making Jesus known and loved. When I lived at Maryvale I experienced people of all ages and stations in life finding direction and peace on their Faith Journey in this place. I am reminded of Deacon Michael McGrial who died last year: he came to visit the chapel one evening in the 80s at a time when he was a teacher of languages in a non-Catholic school but felt there was something missing in his life. I spent time with him, and Sr Philomena, who died last year too, and who had a special role in caring for the Shrine, took him to the Chapel of the Sacred Heart. There he found peace and a renewed Faith, eventually leading to his becoming a Permanent Deacon. He was at the Golden Jubilee of my Ordination to the Priesthood in September 2017.

St John Henry Newman came to live in Maryvale after his conversion: it was here that he founded the Oratory and gave Old Oscott House and Chapel the name Santa Maria in Valle, St Mary in the Valley, Mary's Vale. If you looked down from the top of Old Oscott Hill you would see it's in a valley. It was Newman, who in his "Meditations and Devotions" published in 1893, three years after his death, wrote in a chapter on the Sacred Heart: "O most Sacred, most Loving Heart of Jesus, Thou art conceded in the Holy Eucharist, and Thou beatest for us still".

I have never forgotten those words, and when I had the opportunity in the 80s to restore this Chapel, I installed the little Tabernacle that is there today: making clear the link between Sacred Heart Devotion and the Holy Eucharist, reserved in that Tabernacle.

Interestingly it was when praying before the Blessed Sacrament that Jesus appeared to St Margaret Mary Alacoque in June 1675. His message to her was clear: "Behold this Heart, which has loved men (and woman) so much...and in return has received from the greater number nothing but ingratitude." He then asked her to set aside the Friday after Corpus Christie (held on this day, 16th June, in many places), for special honour to His Heart. That is how the Feast of the Sacred Heart was born.

St Margaret Mary interpreted it as a call to conversion; she insisted that the heart of her devotion was the selfless, sacrificial love of Christ towards all, which was calling mankind to love one another just as Christ loved us. Sr Margaret Mary received several private revelations which led to popular devotions to the Sacred Heart as they remain today: Holy Communion on the First Friday of each month, Eucharistic Devotion during a Holy Hour on Thursdays as well as the Feast of the Sacred Heart.

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I have noted that this Devotion to the Sacred Heart came to be through private revelations before the Blessed Sacrament. In this month of the Solemnity of Corpus Christie, the Body and Blood of Christ, when we focus on the wonder of the real Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist we reflect on how Sacred Heart Devotion leads to the Holy Eucharist in the month that children often make First Holy Communion. It is the month when families have the great joy of introducing their children to the awesome beauty of this Sacrament. I found a translation of the letter written by Andrea Bocelli, the famous tenor and his wife, Veronica, to their daughter Virginia on her First Holy Communion Day. Here is part of it:

“Dear Virginia, how much grace (divine and earthly) filled this day, when you approached the Sacrament of Communion for the first time! That smile that lit you up tells us how you yourself perfectly understood the sweet responsibility and the reason for great joy that this rite encloses and gives us: “communion”, a wonderful word, communion with the world, in which we are brothers and sisters, communion with heaven, whose children we are.”

Because as Pope Francis reminds us, making First Holy Communion means “growing in friendship with Jesus and desiring that others may also enjoy the joy he wants to give us.”

The World Meeting of Families takes place in Rome 22nd – 26th June. “Family Love” will be celebrated across the world; let us pray that in the Church Family love may be nurtured by the selfless love of Jesus:

“Lord, grant that each family might live their specific vocation to holiness in the Church as a call to become missionary disciples, in the service of life and peace.” Amen. (Part of a Prayer from the World Meeting of Families).

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