

*"Go forth from the heart and centre of your own being  
in order that you may find your own heart"*

Karl Rahner

## **Feast of the Sacred Heart 2019**

### *A personal reflection on the contemporary relevance of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*

Whilst writing a reflection for the Feast of the Sacred Heart, my memory takes me back to the first time I gazed upon an image of the Sacred Heart. I was about eight or nine years old, living in our humble rental home in North Fitzroy, Melbourne with my parents, brother and sister. My mother placed the image on the pedestal in her bedroom, accompanied with a Legion of Mary brochure and a statue of Our Lady. There she prayed every night that my father's employment as a railway worker would enable the family to purchase their own home. Eventually this happened when we moved into our new family home in North Carlton when I was 12 years old. The framed image of the Sacred Heart came with us and remained in the family home for the next sixty years! It now resides in my sister's home to this day.

My devotion to the Sacred Heart has ebbed and flowed over time. During my early years, I did not understand the origins of devotion to the Sacred Heart. Perhaps I was not alone in my experience. In Mary and Julian's time, devotion to the Sacred Heart was primarily one of external devotion. Although the more I reflect on their spirituality through reading their letters and recognised biographies, my appreciation that their deep love of the Heart of Jesus was a central theme in their spirituality which they practised with enduring love.

As we approach the Feast of the Sacred Heart, I revisit the origins surrounding the reasons for the sub-title 'of the Sacred Heart' being added to our name as Sisters of Saint Joseph.

Mary Cresp provides a background:

*In Australia, the Church in the time of Mary MacKillop and Julian Tenison Woods promoted with vigour, devotion to the Sacred Heart....The orientation of the charism was to be perpetuated for the Australian Sisters of St Joseph by the addition to their name of a sub-title, "of the Sacred Heart." (In the Spirit of Joseph", Mary Cresp rsj, p.27.)*

The words: "*orientation of the charism was to be perpetuated,*" clarified for me the connection between devotion to the Sacred Heart and living the Josephite charism. The connection was evident in the spiritual lives of Mary MacKillop and Julian Tenison Woods.

Memories continue to linger as I continue to write this reflection. My mother's quiet devotion to the loving Heart of Jesus through daily prayer comes to mind. When I entered the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart in the sixties, my mother often alluded to her image of the Sacred Heart with prayerful gratitude for my vocation. Such was her simple, deep faith and trust in the power of prayer. Prayer for her was a daily activity. Her well-worn Sunday missal, which is in my possession today, reminds me of her devotion to the Indwelling Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

As Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart we are preparing for the 27th General Chapter 2019. In my view the Chapter theme: *Raising the Powers of Love .... Go and Do*

*the Same*, resonates with the spirituality of the Sacred Heart as I understand and appreciate it today. The theme is rich in meaning as we enter into a new and challenging phase of our Josephite story. At the same time the theme nurtures a desire to practise love in ordinary and simple ways, recognising that every relationship we enter into has the potential of raising the power of love. There are many challenges ahead as we navigate our way into the future. Through listening with the ear of heart to the needs of those we encounter on a daily basis, the challenges will be met with renewed compassion and joyful hope.

The forthcoming Plenary Council in 2020 is a further opportunity for our active participation together with the Laity, when our combined voices as agents for change, has the potential to make a creative difference for *'the new'* to emerge within the current crisis in the Church. May we be confident to the call of Spirit to renew our minds and hearts for guidance.

Exploring the relevance of memories has been a creative tool in deepening my appreciation of the spirituality of the Sacred Heart. As the Feast Day draws near, I will hold the memories I have shared with gentleness and gratitude. However, I believe a contemporary relevance of devotion to the Sacred Heart is primarily reflected in the unique relationship each person has with the Heart of Jesus. As the psalmist says:

*" In prayer I shall lead them and guide them to springs of living water." (psalm 119)*



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