

**Jesus, in his life, agony and Passion, knew and loved each one of us**

Continuing to look at Pope Francis' final encyclical, *Dilexit Nos* [DN] – 'On the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ' – we take up his reflections on the devotion of *consoling* Our Lord's Sacred Heart, wounded by our sins.

He explores this devotion in an extended section of *Dilexit Nos* ('The Devotion of Consolation', nn. 151-163), drawing especially on Pope Pius XI's 1928 Encyclical *Miserentissimus Redemptor* 'On Reparation to the Sacred Heart'. 'It is fitting', Pope Francis writes, 'to recover one particular aspect of the spirituality that has accompanied devotion to the heart of Christ, namely, the interior desire to offer consolation to that heart...the desire often felt in the hearts of the faithful who lovingly contemplate the mystery of Christ's passion and experience it as a mystery which is not only recollected but becomes present to us by grace, or better, allows us to be mystically present at the moment of our redemption. If we truly love the Lord, how could we not desire to console him?' (DN 152)

We think for example of St Francisco Marto. As St John Paul II recounted at his beatification: among the three seers of Fátima, 'God told only Francisco "how sad" he was, as he said. One night his father heard him sobbing and asked him why he was crying; his son answered: "I was thinking of Jesus who is so sad because of the sins that are committed against him". He was motivated by one desire – so expressive of how children think – "to console Jesus and make him happy".' (Homily for the Beatification of Francisco and Jacinta Marto, Fátima, 13/05/2000)

But this devotion of consoling Our Lord obviously goes beyond individual saints. Pope Francis writes: 'Pope Pius XI wished to ground this particular devotion in the realisation that the mystery of our redemption by Christ's passion transcends, by God's grace, all boundaries of time and space. On the cross, Jesus offered himself for all sins, including those yet to be committed, including our own sins. In the same way, the acts we now offer for his consolation, also transcending time, touch his wounded heart.' (DN 153)

Francis takes up a question from Pope Pius: "'How can these acts of reparation offer solace now, when Christ is already reigning in the beatitude of heaven? To this question, we may answer [Pius says] in the words of Saint Augustine... 'Give me the one who loves, and he will understand what I say'.'" (DN 155, quoting *Miserentissimus Redemptor* 13)

Pius XI explains: 'The sins of men and their crimes committed in every age were the cause why Christ was delivered up to death, and now also they would of themselves bring death to Christ, joined with the same griefs and sorrows, since each several sin in its own way is held to renew the passion of Our Lord: "Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making him a mockery" (Heb 6:6).' (*Miserentissimus Redemptor* 13)

Pope Pius continues, as quoted by Pope Francis: "'If, because of our sins too, as yet in the future but already foreseen, the soul of Jesus became sorrowful unto death, it cannot be doubted that at the same time he derived some solace from our reparation, likewise foreseen, at the moment when 'there appeared to him an angel from heaven' (Lk 22:43), in order that his heart, oppressed with weariness and anguish, might find consolation. And so even now, in a wondrous yet true manner, we can and ought to console that Most Sacred Heart, which is continually wounded by the sins of thankless men".' (DN 153, quoting *Miserentissimus Redemptor* 13)

How are we to understand this ‘foreseeing’ by Christ of our individual sins and acts of reparation? Here we digress to reflect on Christ’s knowledge, divine and human. God the Son, in the infinite divine knowledge he has with the Father and the Holy Spirit, obviously knows all things eternally. But this mystery of Christ, knowing us personally and individually during his Passion, concerns the knowledge he has *as man*.

As fully and truly human, he possesses both a true human body and a true human soul. So on the one hand, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, ‘this human soul that the Son of God assumed is endowed with a true human knowledge. As such, this knowledge could not in itself be unlimited: it was exercised in the historical conditions of his existence in space and time. This is why the Son of God could, when he became man, “increase in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man”, (*Lk* 2:52) and would even have to inquire for himself about what one in the human condition can learn only from experience. (Cf. *Mk* 6:38; 8:27; *Jn* 11:34; etc.)’ (*Catechism* n. 472)

‘But at the same time’, the *Catechism* continues, ‘this truly human knowledge of God’s Son expressed the divine life of his person. (Cf. St Gregory the Great, *Sicut aqua* (DS 475)) “The human nature of God’s Son, *not by itself but by its union with the Word*, knew and showed forth in itself everything that pertains to God.” (St Maximus the Confessor) Such is first of all the case with the intimate and immediate knowledge that the Son of God made man has of his Father (Cf. *Mk* 14:36; *Mt* 11:27; *Jn* 1:18; 8:55; etc.) ...By its union to the divine wisdom in the person of the Word incarnate, Christ enjoyed in his human knowledge the fullness of understanding of the eternal plans he had come to reveal. (Cf. *Mk* 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34; 14:18-20, 26-30) What he admitted to not knowing in this area [*i.e. the day of judgement*], he elsewhere declared himself not sent to reveal. (Cf. *Mk* 13:32, *Acts* 1:7)’ (*Catechism* nn. 473-74)

The *Catechism* goes on to affirm: ‘Jesus knew and loved us *each and all* during his life, his agony and his Passion, and gave himself up *for each one of us*: “The Son of God...loved me and gave himself for me.” (*Gal* 2:20) He has loved us all with a human heart.’ (n. 478; italics added) By saying ‘each’, and not just ‘all’, the *Catechism* highlights that Our Lord, in his human nature and during his earthly life, knew and loved each one of us individually and personally.

We recall the teaching of Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation on St Thérèse, *C’est la confiance*. He writes: ‘Thérèse possessed complete certainty that Jesus loved her and knew her personally at the time of his Passion: “He loved me and gave himself for me” (*Gal* 2:20). As she contemplated Jesus in his agony, she told him: “You saw me” ... At the beginning of the *Story of a Soul*, she contemplated the love of Jesus for all humanity and for each individual, as if he or she were the only one in the world.’ (*C’est la confiance* 33 (2023))

As Pius XII taught in his Encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ: ‘...the knowledge and love of our Divine Redeemer, of which we were the object from the first moment of His Incarnation, exceed all that the human intellect can hope to grasp. For hardly was He conceived in the womb of the Mother of God, when He began to enjoy the Beatific Vision...’ (*Mystici Corporis* 75 (1943) (DS 3812) – quoted in Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Notification*, 26/11/2006, 8; and referenced in *Catechism* n. 478)

Pope Pius continues: ‘In that vision all the members of His Mystical Body were continually and unceasingly present to Him, and He embraced them with His redeeming love...In the crib, on the Cross, in the unending glory of the Father, Christ has all the members of the Church present before Him and united to Him in a much clearer and more loving manner than that of a mother who clasps her child to her breast, or than that with which a man knows and loves himself.’ (*Mystici Corporis* 75) Repeating St Paul’s words: ‘He loved *me* and gave himself *for me*.’