

**Homily at the Solemn Profession of Sister Mechtilde OSB**  
**St Cecilia's Abbey Ryde**  
**Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus 2018**

The Solemnity of the Sacred Heart is a feast of the Incarnation – of the mystery of Jesus Christ both God and man and so it touches no every other feast of the year and is at the heart of the mystery of our salvation. The Incarnation is what Bl John Henry Newman held to be the main principle of theology of understanding God – and for Dom Guéranger it was prolonged in the mystery of the Church and in the liturgy. By focussing on the love of the heart of Jesus we are moved by the fullness of his humanity – and drawn in by the fullness of his divinity and the feast is an invitation to us to participate in the divine life.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart is much loved by our Bishop Philip – he consecrated this diocese to the Sacred Heart early in his episcopate – and we know that it is his custom to sign his letters, pastoral circulars, ad clerums, and other such *fatwas* issued from Bishop's House '*in corde Jesu*' – in the heart of Jesus. I am grateful that he has given place to me to preach at this Mass. It is also a feast of this house of St Cecilia's – *Pax cordis Jesu. Peace of the Heart of Jesus.*

Devotion to the Sacred Heart was made popular, of course, by the French St Margaret Mary Alacoque in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but this devotion has a strong monastic and Benedictine pedigree in the visions and writings of St Gertrude the Great and St Mechtilde in the thirteenth century and in the writings of Carthusian authors. For Gertrude, her visions of the Sacred Heart turned a monastic life which was becoming limited and arid into a vocation which was vibrant and alive. *In a happy hour, she wrote, at the beginning of twilight, thou O God of truth, more radiant than any light, yet deeper than any secret thing, determined to dissolve the obscurity of my darkness.* The transforming experience was a vision and a profound personal sense of the Love of the Heart of Jesus. Her biographer wrote that she ceased at this point to be a **grammarian** and began to be **theologian**. In other words her experience of the personal love of Jesus for her so overwhelmed her that the theory and all the petty things and minor skirmishes which constituted monastic living paled into insignificance, or at least were given context. Theory became practice. This was a moment of monastic maturity for her. A moment when the rule was no longer restricting but liberating. Gertrude and Mechtilde became very great saints.

For the rhythm, the measure of their life these saints looked to the Heart of Jesus. In one of her visions Gertrude saw St John the Evangelist and she asked him what the heartbeat of the Lord was like. St John had lain on our Lord's breast at the last supper and heard closely the beating of our Lord's heart. He told her that it had been a 'penetrating sweetness'. Being a good nun she was not going to be

easily fobbed off with this answer. If it was such a penetrating sweetness, she asked, then why did you not mention it in your gospel?! St John explained that his work was to announce the Eternal Word of God – but the sweetness of the heart of Jesus was a devotion to be kept secret, something that would bear fruit in latter times that the time-worn world, grown cold in the love of God, might be warmed up by hearing of such mysteries.

So, Sr Mechtilde, – all this teaches you something about the monastic vocation to which you definitively attach yourself today. Hidden in the cloister you live this hidden life – hidden in Christ whose rhythm is the steady beat of the heart of Jesus. In a world which has indeed grown cold in love, you live that vocation which St Therese called ‘love in the heart of the Church’ and in the silence offered by the cloister you are able to live by a rhythm which is the heartbeat of Jesus. This is a long-term investment which gives autumn fruits, not spring fruits.

In stability you make these stones of St Cecilia’s and the living stones of this monastic community an environment in which you can listen to the beat of our Lord’s heart – where is that rhythm to be found? Well, in the daily round of chores, in the great machine of blessing which is constituted by the wheels and cogs of the daily, weekly, yearly cycle of the liturgy. In your *yes*, your *fiat*, to what God, what the community asks of you, you respond to the annunciation made to you in the prologue to the Holy Rule – to listen and to follow Christ to glory.

In conversion of life – *conversio conversation morum*, you vow to reorient your life constantly towards God. You discipline your heart so that you build an interior cloister within you – a heart spiritually ordered so as to be a welcoming place for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. St Gertrude saw the heart of Jesus in a thurible into which all our offerings and sacrifices are poured and become fragrant and unite with His.

In obedience you embrace the mystery of the Cross – you put to death in you all that does not lead to God. And you embrace the contradictions, the misunderstandings, the challenges of community life – developing a spirituality of the Cross which is personal to you and which arms and equips you for the challenges to come. The burning furnace of love which is the heart of Jesus is a heart pierced with a lance. Just as our Benedictine *Pax* – peace – is *inter spinas* – amongst thorns-so the heart of Jesus is crowned with thorns and pierced with the lance. Love demands sacrifice, self-giving, tremendous generosity. Our *resurrectio* and *vita* come through a putting to death, a mortification, day to day of all that impedes Christ’s life from living in us.

Our monastic desire to be plunged into the mystery of the heart of Christ reminds us of that life that teemed from his wounded side. By living a liturgical life, close to the altar, we live close to the source of all life. And being close to the Word of God the creator of all things, we are close to all things. In a mysterious way you come closer to those from whom the walls of the monastery separate you. Your communion with them is more profound when *in Christo* in Christ.

*Jesus meek and humble of Heart make my heart like unto thine* – so the prayer goes. The essence of the monastic enterprise is this integrity this interior unity this oneness which is signified by the very word ‘monk’. Our world today is very unfocussed. Jesus promised that when two or three are gathered in his name he would be present – but sometimes we are not even entirely present even when on our own. We are broken and divided in ourselves. Our prayer for you Sr Mechtilde on this great day is that you may be one. This is your happy hour (maybe happy two hours would be more accurate!) Our prayer is that hat your heart will be undivided, that in your little life here you will play your part in putting the world back together and undoing the fragmentation which is so much part of modern life. That your closeness to the Heart of Jesus may be fruitful to the this community, the Benedictine family, this diocese, to the Church, to a world grown cold in love.

May God who has begun this good work in you bring it to completion! And may the Sacred Heart of Jesus, fount of love and of graces and blessings, pour out every grace and blessing upon you today.

Dom Cuthbert Brogan OSB  
Abbot of Farnborough