

10th Sunday (B)

9th June 2024

‘Sacred Heart — heart of the loving Family of Jesus’

Gen 3: the Fall

Ps 129: *with the Lord there is mercy & the fullness of redemption*

2Cor: *we believe and therefore we speak ...*

Mk 3: 20–35: *it is the end of Satan*

The month of June, in the Church, is the month dedicated each year to prayer to the *Sacred Heart of Jesus* — much as May is dedicated to Our Lady, or October to the Holy Rosary, or November to the Holy Souls. I have brought back out, again, this weekend, the image of the Sacred Heart — which shows Our Lord’s heart burning with love for us, and yet also wounded (encircled by the crown of thorns) by us, by our sins. The famous image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, popularized in the 17th c. by the French nun, the saintly visionary Margaret Mary Alacoque, draws us in to the joy of divine love for humanity. The infinite love of God for us is contained within that human heart of Jesus — the Son of God made man for our sake. To have a picture before us of the one we love — the one we will welcome lovingly into our midst in this Mass, and into our heart at Holy Communion — is a beautiful and human thing to do. As we display the image of Jesus’s Sacred Heart, whether

here in church, or in our dwelling, we are reminded of the one we love above all, and we give thanks for His infinite love. Displaying this image in our domestic setting, in our homes or rooms, is a pious and traditional practice, linked to the 9th of 12 promises made by Our Lord to St Margaret Mary in 1675: “*I will bless every place where a picture of My heart shall be exposed and honoured.*” It’s a simple way of making holy the place where we live, and bringing a visible remembrance of the love of the Saviour right into our day-to-day setting. (I have ordered some more such prints, so that you can spread this pious practice as students in your lodgings.) It is so good to have Jesus, as it were, *on our wall*, making Him a natural part of our ‘family’ pictures displayed for our fond and daily remembrance.

The Scripture of this Sunday — back as we are, now, in the ‘Ordinary Sundays of the Year,’ following the sequence of Gospel passages from St Mark’s Gospel, in ch. 3, today — brings us to reflect on the *family*: on the ‘original family’ of Adam & Eve; on the family relations of Jesus; and on His new family, the Church. Mixed in with

this, in both the Genesis reading and the Gospel encounters with Jesus in Mk 3, is the repeated mention of Satan, the one who frustrates the family God has willed.

In ‘the Fall’ as Genesis describes it, it is Satan — a fallen angel — who tempts Eve and Adam to go against the command of God, and then when they sin, they discover not the awesome freedom that the devil had suggested would be theirs, but a guilt-filled regret, and a desire to hide from God and to engage in mutual recriminations against each other. But even as they suffer the fall-out from this ‘original sin’ of proud rebellion against God’s will — the breakdown of the original family — they are offered the promise of *a new family* who will resist and overcome the devil as they had not been up to doing: the family of Mary & Jesus, “the woman ... and her offspring,” who between them will crush the devil’s proud head. Even at the outset of humanity’s history, therefore, the drama of the lies of the devil vs. the saving truth of Jesus is coming in to play: a blessed family life for God’s family of mankind is so dependent on aligning themselves with the

holy family of Jesus, and not with the one who causes break-up and has no desire to promote family life.

In the Gospel, Our Lord is accused, horrifically, of being Himself *aligned* with the devil! — it is this sin that Jesus, I think, refers to as “an eternal sin”: the wilful confusion of God’s holy Son with the actions of the evil one; in other words, deliberately calling right ‘wrong’ and *vice versa*. There is no way, surely, that one can in any way confuse the words, actions, sufferings, and very *being* of Christ Jesus with the work of evil: His whole divine person is oriented towards the absolute *good*, and is the very antidote to the lies, deception, deceit and disharmony of the devil. His is the restoration of the human family, and He does so with Mary most holy. Mother and Son, in association first with St Joseph, begin the definitive rebuilding of the human family in holiness. It is to them that we look, as we want to promote our own lives — and family lives — in holiness. Gazing towards them: seeing the *divine* love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; imitating the perfect *human* response of reflected love which fills the

Immaculate Heart of Mary — these are our starting point for knowing how to build up a family of love.

We might wonder, in this context, then, why it is that, in the final passage, Jesus seems to ‘snub’ His own family, His “mother and brothers.” When they arrive to speak to Him, He doesn’t rush away from teaching His disciples; instead He refers to them, each of His hearers, as His “brother and sister and mother.” But we are not to understand this as a rude rebuttal of Mary. Not at all: Mary is the first and *foremost* of His disciples; she is the very one who said ‘yes’ first to the audacious new plan of God in the Incarnation; she is not *less* His Mother for being His first disciple; she is even *more* His Mother for that fact. We know less about other cousins and relations of Our Lord, as to their adherence to His message, apart from St John the Baptist, of course, and one of the saints ‘James’ of the apostolic era who is referred to as “the brother of the Lord,” meaning some degree of male relation.

Our Lord’s main point is the insistence on His family being the *family of faith*. Mary is, of course, at the

heart of this family; she is not snubbed by Him, just the opposite: she is honoured and revered by Him; hence our whole tradition of Marian piety, including the idea of her being ‘crowned’ Queen of Heaven by Him and at His side in glory. Our Lord prioritizes, in His comment, the relationship of *faith* over the relationship of *blood*. This must have been a harsh word to have listened to, in that Semitic world where blood ties were so precious. And yet Jesus makes this bold claim, “*Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother.*” It places the people of the Church, His fervent believers, right alongside Him, as He renews humanity. We are truly His adopted brothers and sisters — we are grafted on to that divine Vine of grace and spiritual growth — by our faith and Baptism, and then continuously nourished by the sacrificial food and drink that is His Holy Eucharist. We are, really and truly, His *family*; the new family of mankind, purged of the original sin that began to break up the human race at the very start, in the Garden of Eden. We must never, ever, feel divorced from Him, or adrift, or

lost; His family is there for us always, with Him and His holy Mother at its very heart. This family of the Christian people is our mainstay, our home, our refuge, our support. We can do no better in life than to be expressing our Christian-family life, in prayer, charity, and socially too, as much as possible, so as to have the greatest chance of living a human life well. Let's never turn our backs on the Church, or drift away from her, or sideline her, or give second place to her ... By doing so, we would be de-prioritizing Jesus Himself, and Mary, and causing all sorts of fault-lines to grow in our spiritual life. We absolutely need the family of the Church to be blessed and happy; happy are we who know the Church, and can have this blessed access to Our Lord and Our Lady. Mother and Son desire so much that we are in sacred relation to them, and in daily contact, so as to learn the love that they share and which is the model of all human loving.

Even as we prioritize this belonging to, and living actively in, the Church's family, so we are not excluding others, or demeaning them: the invitation is *always there*

for others to join our family. We do not exclude; we invite, we welcome, and we rejoice to have others join us. It was one of the *special* joys of this past academic year to have 4 new baptized and confirmed members join us in the family of Jesus at Easter. This we need to repeat, over and over again, the world over. The family of Jesus and Mary must grow; it must be vibrant, alive, and attentive to the Word of God uttered to us by our Saviour in His one saving Gospel message.

Let's hear, to end with, a few of the other promises made to St Margaret Mary as she received the devotion desired by Jesus for His Sacred Heart. Let's make these our own, as we hear them now; let's know that we *can have* these blessings by living consciously and closely in the family of the Church, comfortingly held close to the hearts of Jesus and Mary — our divine Brother and Saviour; our blessed Mother and so-powerful intercessor:

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state of life.
2. I will give peace in their families.
3. I will console them in all their troubles.
4. They shall find in my Heart an assured refuge during life and especially at the hour of death. Amen.