

Homily, Feast of the Sacred Heart, June 16, 2023 Christ the King Church, Southaven

We gather joyfully at the Eucharist, the great prayer of thanksgiving, as we mark the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the Priests of the Sacred Heart in the United States, and 80 years here in northern Mississippi, known as the Sacred Heart Southern Missions. Father Ardi informed me before Mass that it is also the 100th anniversary of the Priests of the Sacred Heart in Indonesia where their mission continues to thrive. This beloved and dynamic religious order, founded in 1878 by the Venerable Father Leo John Dehon whose missionary desire was to diffuse far and wide the Sacred Heart of Jesus, remains faithful to Christ's work of rebuilding our world into God's kingdom of justice and love.

I stand with the Bishops of Jackson since 1942 when Bishop Richard Oliver Gerow invited the Priests of the Sacred Heart to expand their mission and ministries in the United States to northern Mississippi. This was a fortuitous moment in the history of the Diocese of Natchez. For the past 80 years the SCJs have witnessed to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through worship, through education, and through social action on behalf of justice and the common good which is evident in the array of ministries that continue to rebuild God's kingdom of justice and love.

On this feast of the Sacred Heart the biblical texts draw us more deeply into the height and depth, length and breadth of God's love. From Deuteronomy we heard that God set his heart on Israel, and his compassion and mercy will endure over a 1,000 generations. Jesus in the Gospel of Luke assures his listeners, then and now, that he is "meek and humble of heart, and we will find rest in him." Here together at the Eucharist we are yoked to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a people set apart in praise of God "who has loved us first," in the words of Saint John in the second reading.

In this year of Eucharistic revival in our nation let us cherish the words of Father Dehon in our celebration of faith. "When we adore the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Eucharist, our adoration does not always require many words; there are moments when silence itself is eloquent. Our heart must become a ciborium in which the Eucharistic Heart alone reposes. I leave you the most wonderful of treasures, the Heart of Jesus." Father Dehon inspires us to embrace the awesome mystery of the real presence of the Lord. "All the sacraments are marvelous gifts of our Lord, but the Eucharist far surpasses the others. For in the others, he gives us his grace; in the Eucharist, he gives us himself."

Pope Benedict, in *Sacramentum Caritatis*, (2007) the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist, captures this Dehonian charism of the Eucharist as bread broken for the life of the world. "The bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51). Pope Benedict wrote that in these words "the Lord reveals the true meaning of the gift of his life for all people. These words also reveal his deep compassion for every man and woman. The Gospels frequently speak of Jesus' feelings towards others, especially the suffering and sinners... Our communities, when they celebrate the Eucharist, must become ever more conscious that the sacrifice of Christ is for all, and that the Eucharist thus compels all who believe in him to become "bread that is broken"

for others, and to work for the building of a more just and fraternal world. Keeping in mind the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, we need to realize that Christ continues today to exhort his disciples to become personally engaged. 'You yourselves, give them something to eat.' (*Mt* 14:16). Each of us is truly called, together with Jesus, to be bread broken for the life of the world." This is the Dehonian spirit that continues to inspire many in our time through the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Through the worldwide Synodal process, Pope Francis has invited the People of God to embrace our identity through communion, participation and mission. From the water and blood that flowed from the pierced heart of Christ on the Cross, our communion flows from our Baptism and through the Eucharist. We are invited into active participation around the tables of God's Word and Sacrament, and from this source and summit we are sent on mission to actively participate in the drama of the Kingdom of God. This Dehonian charism is alive on both fronts, so to speak, as a people of contemplation in worship, and as a people of action in an array of ministries.

At this time I invite members of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, as well as the Dehonian Associates, to come forward to renew their commitments to serve the Lord in his Kingdom of justice and love.

- Bishop Joseph Kopacz