



Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

August 12, 2023

Dear Brothers,

For our Centennial celebrations, I had the privilege of welcoming several provincials and others from our Congregation. They came to celebrate this historic moment with us, and it was a pleasure to get to know them better. During our conversations, they told me that they were impressed by how friendly and hospitable Americans are.

They especially felt very welcome among us. I found it heartening that so many of you took the time to be with them. As we all know, hospitality is about more than just entertaining people and inviting them for a meal. It's about inclusiveness – making everyone feel that they belong.

Hospitality was one of the points brought to the fore in one of the facilitated conversations at the XVII Provincial Chapter. It was said that we are incredibly hospitable to our guests. Hearing our staff and collaborators say what they see in us was heartening. But I am fully aware that hospitality is not equally given. All of us – not just within the SCJ community – are guilty of welcoming some guests as royals, while treating others as paupers. Why are we welcoming to some and not to others? Economic status? Intellectual giftedness? A general feeling that a certain person is “not of our league”?

For us Christians, hospitality has its roots in the Bible, as seen in the story of Abram welcoming the three strangers, and God's hospitality to the Israelites through their deliverance from Egypt and daily provision in the wilderness. Additionally, God

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commanded the Israelites to be hospitable and welcoming to strangers and foreigners, as they knew firsthand what it felt like to be strangers in Egypt. In the New Testament, Jesus himself became a guest, relying on the hospitality of others. But he too was a host. He gathered people to himself to help them recognize that God has a special love and a tender heart for them.

Hospitality is a vital duty for all, treating guests and friends alike, and welcoming others into our communal spaces and lives. The early Christians understood the connection between hospitality and the Eucharist. The Acts of the Apostles tells us that the early believers broke bread in each other's homes, ate their meals with glad and generous hearts, and enjoyed each other's company (2:42-47). In this light, hospitality is not just for those whom we have recently met, or for our guests, but for all of those with whom we regularly interact. Pope John Paul II emphasized that welcoming others with care and willingness should not just be reserved for special occasions but should become a *habit* in our daily lives as believers (Address to volunteer workers, March 8, 1997).



Photo: Mary Gorski

As we remember Fr. Leo John Dehon on his anniversary of death, let's emulate the example of the "Très Bon Père" in embracing the all-encompassing love of the Sacred Heart so that we may have life abundantly and that we may share life with others generously. He noted: "Let us keep ourselves peacefully and meekly in the presence of the Sacred Heart, under his rays of love, near this hearth of love; let us contemplate his works of love, and a reciprocal love will be born in our heart."¹

Fraternally,

¹ Leo John Dehon, SCJ. *Crowns of Love for the Sacred Heart*, Volume I, 2nd Mystery, 3rd Meditation