

We are losing compassion

5 November 2021

Homily held in the Holy Mass on the 60th anniversary of the inauguration of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart

Pope Francis

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As we commemorate with gratitude the gift of this seat of the Catholic University, I would like to share with you some thoughts in relation to its name. It is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as is this day, the first Friday of the month. Contemplating the Heart of Jesus, we can let ourselves be guided by three words: memory, passion and consolation.

Remembrance. To remember [in Italian, *ricordare*], means “to return to the heart, to return with the heart”. *Ricordare*. What does the Sacred Heart of Jesus make us return to? To what He did for us: the Heart of Christ shows us Jesus who offers Himself, it is the compendium of his mercy. Looking at it – like John did in the Gospel (19: 31-37), it comes naturally to us to remember his goodness, which is freely given, which can be neither bought nor sold; and unconditional, it does not depend on our actions, it is sovereign. And it is moving. In today’s haste, in the midst of a thousand errands and continuous worries, we are losing the capacity to be moved and to feel compassion, because we are losing this return to the heart, that is, this memory, this return to the heart. Without memory one loses one’s roots, and without roots, one does not grow. It is good for us to nurture the memory of who has loved us, cared for us, and lifted us up. I would like to renew today my “thanks” for the care and the affection I have received here. I believe that in this time of the pandemic it is good for us to remember even of the times we have suffered the most: not to make us sad, but so as not to forget, and to guide us in our choices in the light of a very recent past.

I wonder: how does our memory work? To simplify, we could say that we remember someone or something when it touches our heart, when it binds us to a particular affection or lack of affection. And so the Heart of Jesus heals our memory because it brings it back to the fundamental affection. It roots it on the most solid base. It reminds us that, whatever happens to us in life, we are loved. Yes, we are loved beings, children whom the Father loves always and, in any case, brothers and sisters for whom the Heart of Christ beats. Every time we peer into that Heart we discover ourselves “rooted and grounded in love”, as the Apostle Paul said in today’s first reading (Eph 3:17).

Let us cultivate this memory, which is strengthened when we are face to face with the Lord, especially when we let ourselves be looked upon and loved by Him in adoration. But we can also cultivate among ourselves the art of remembering, of treasuring the faces we meet. I think of the tiring days in hospital, at university, at work. We run the risk that everything will pass without a trace, or that only fatigue and tiredness will remain. It is good for us, in the evening, to look back on the faces we have met, the smiles we have received, the good words. They are memories of love and they help our memory to find itself again: may our memory find itself again. How important these memories are in hospitals! They can give meaning to a sick person’s day. A fraternal word, a smile, a caress on the face: these are memories that heal inside, they do the heart good. Let us not forget the therapy of remembering: it does so much good!

Passion is the second word. Passion. The first is memory, remembering; the second is passion. The Heart of Christ is not a pious devotion, so as to feel a little warmth inside; it is not a tender image that arouses affection, no, it is not that. It is a passionate heart – just read the Gospel -, a heart wounded with love, torn open for us on the cross. We have heard how the Gospel speaks of it: “One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water” (Jn 19:34). Pierced, He gives; in death, He gives us life. The Sacred Heart is the icon of the Passion: it shows us God’s visceral tenderness, his loving passion for us, and at the same time, surmounted by the cross and surrounded by thorns, it shows us how much suffering our salvation cost. In its tenderness and pain, that Heart reveals, in short, what God’s passion is. What is it? Man, us. And what is God’s style? Closeness, compassion and tenderness. This is God’s style: closeness, compassion and tenderness.

What does this suggest? That, if we really want to love God, we must be passionate about humanity, about all humanity, especially those who live the condition in which the Heart of Jesus was manifested, that is, pain, abandonment and rejection; especially in this throwaway culture that we live in today. When we serve those who suffer we console and rejoice in the Heart of Christ. One passage in the Gospel is striking. John the Evangelist, at the very moment when he recounts the pierced side, from which blood and water flow, bears witness so that we may believe (cf. v. 35). Saint John writes, that is, that at that moment the testimony occurs.

Because the pierced Heart of God is eloquent. It speaks without words, because it is mercy in its pure state, love that is wounded and gives life. It is God, with closeness, compassion and tenderness. How many words we say about God without showing love! But love speaks for itself, it does not speak of itself. Let us ask for the grace to become passionate about the man who suffers, to become passionate about service, so that the Church, before having words to say, may keep a heart that beats with love. Before speaking, may she learn to safeguard her heart in love.

The third word is comfort. The first was remembrance, the second passion, the third is consolation. It indicates a strength that does not come from us, but from those who are with us: that is where strength comes from. Jesus, the God-with-us, gives us this strength, his Heart gives us courage in adversity. So many uncertainties frighten us: in this time of the pandemic we have found ourselves to be smaller, more fragile. In spite of so many marvellous advances, this is also evident in the medical field: so many rare and unknown diseases! When I find people in the audiences – especially children – and I ask: “Are you ill?” – [they answer] “A rare disease”. There are so many of them today! How hard it is to keep up with pathologies, with treatment facilities, with healthcare that is really what it should be, for everyone. We could become discouraged. That is why we need consolation – the third word. The Heart of Jesus beats for us, always repeating those words: “Courage, courage, do not be afraid, I am here!”. Courage, sister, courage, brother, do not lose heart, the Lord your God is greater than your ills, He takes you by the hand and caresses you, He is close to you, He is compassionate, He is tender. He is your comfort.

If we look at reality from the greatness of his Heart, the perspective changes, our knowledge of life changes because, as Saint Paul reminded us, we know “the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge” (Eph 3:19). Let us encourage ourselves with this certainty, with God’s comfort. And let us ask the Sacred Heart for the grace to be able to console in turn. It is a grace that must be asked for, as we courageously commit ourselves to opening up, helping one another, carrying one another’s burdens. It also applies to the future of health care, especially “Catholic” health care: sharing, supporting each other, moving forward together.

May Jesus open the hearts of those who care for the sick to collaboration and cohesion. To your Heart, Lord, we entrust our vocation to care: let us make every person who approaches us in need feel they are dear to us. Amen.