

# 'Heartlessness' a key issue, pope says

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |

In his new encyclical *Dilexit Nos*, Pope Francis gives the Church a beautiful reflection on the tender love of Christ. Taken from St. Paul's line "He has loved us" (Romans 8:37), the Holy Father prescribes the devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a worldwide remedy for our times.

Although I would recommend reading the whole document — again, it is beautiful to read — here are a few key themes:

- **More reflective:** Pope Francis' teaching is deeply reflective. Using Scripture, history and the writing of the saints, he shows how the Church has always had a devotion to the wounded side of Christ, who in his mercy gave forth blood and water for our salvation (John 19:31-37). This prepared the Church for the devotion of the Sacred Heart.
- **First to Jesus, then to the Father:** The Holy Father stresses how the Sacred Heart draws us unto Jesus and then to the Father. The Sacred Heart is a "synthesis of the Gospel" message — in Jesus, God has come to save us by becoming one of us: "(God) chose to love each of us with a human heart...in gazing upon the Lord's heart, we contemplate a physical reality, his human flesh" which then leads us to his divinity: "the Church has chosen the image of the heart to represent the human and divine love of Jesus Christ and the inmost core of his Person." By drawing us to his merciful heart, the pope teaches, Jesus "wants to bring us to the Father...Jesus' life among us was a journey of response to the constant call of his human heart to come to the Father."
- **The problem of heartlessness:** The pope identifies heartlessness as the core issue of our time. Although humanity has always contended with sin, the modern world's consumerism, skepticism and overindulgence in technology means "no room is left for the heart." As such, humanity loses its identity: "We also lose track of history and our own past, since our real personal history is built with the heart."

What, then, should a Christian do? Pope Francis identifies two ways for us to counteract the problem of heartlessness: "personal spiritual experience and communal missionary commitment."

- **Our own story with Jesus:** Quoting St. Justin Martyr, the Holy Father says we must all remember that "we have come forth from the heart of Christ." Jesus makes us a new creation in him, so we must turn to him in our own daily needs. We cannot do anything without Jesus! "Let us not forget that our hearts are not self-sufficient, but frail and wounded."

The pope continues that the Sacred Heart “invites us to grow in our encounter with Christ, putting our trust in his love.” Once we grow in this way, we can then — heart to Heart — console Jesus over the world’s indifference to him by making reparation, like prayer and small sacrifices. The Sacred Heart also purifies our hearts through a deeper compunction, or “a beneficial piercing,” which makes us feel how our sins hurt him.

- **Bringing Jesus to others:** In his hallmark style, Pope Francis concludes the encyclical by emphasizing that we must bring the Lord Jesus to others. This starts by asking for forgiveness from those we have hurt and by seeking to mend wounded relationships. This makes us able to “grow in fraternity and solidarity” with others who need healing or who may be far from Jesus.

By turning to the Sacred Heart, we bring the “flames of the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus” to a world that has grown cold toward God’s love and to those who are forgotten: “the poor, the despised and the abandoned members of society.”

What are some ways that you can deepen your devotion to the Sacred Heart? What are some ways that God is calling you to bring his love to those in need?

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## **Sacred Heart encyclical: Only love will save humanity**

written by Catholic News Service |



A world that has become “heartless” and indifferent to greed and war, and a Catholic Church in need of revitalizing its missionary joy need to open themselves up to Christ’s infinite love, Pope Francis wrote.

By contemplating Jesus’ Sacred Heart, the faithful can be filled with the “living water that can heal the hurt we have caused, strengthen our ability to love and serve others, and inspire us to journey together toward a just, solidary and fraternal world,” the pope wrote in his encyclical, “Dilexit nos’ (‘He loved us’): on the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ.”

The Vatican released the 28,000-word text Oct. 24.

While it is the pope’s fourth encyclical, he wrote that it is meant to be understood in tandem with his previous two encyclicals, “Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home” and “Fratelli Tutti, on Fraternity and Social Friendship.”

“The present document can help us see that the teaching of the social encyclicals ... is not unrelated to our encounter with the love of Jesus Christ,” he wrote. “For it is by drinking of that same love that we become capable of forging bonds of fraternity, of recognizing the dignity of each human being and of working together to care for our common home.”

The pope had said in June, the month the Church traditionally dedicates to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, that he was going to release a document in the fall on the devotion to “illuminate the path of ecclesial renewal, but also to say something significant to a world that seems to have lost its heart.”

The encyclical includes numerous reflections from the Bible, previous magisterial texts and the writings of saints and his fellow Jesuits, to re-propose to the whole Church the centuries-old

devotion. Since 1899, there have been four papal encyclicals and numerous papal texts dedicated to the Sacred Heart — a symbol of Jesus' infinite love, which moves the faithful to love one another.

He wrote, "When we witness the outbreak of new wars, with the complicity, tolerance or indifference of other countries, or petty power struggles over partisan interests, we may be tempted to conclude that our world is losing its heart."

"It is heartbreaking," he wrote, to see elderly women, who should be enjoying their golden years, experiencing the anguish, fear and outrage of war. "To see these elderly women weep, and not feel that this is something intolerable, is a sign of a world that has grown heartless."

At a Vatican news conference presenting the encyclical Oct. 24, Archbishop Bruno Forte of Chieti-Vasto, Italy, said the document is a "compendium" and the "key" to understanding Pope Francis' pontificate.

Some commentators criticize the pope for focusing too narrowly on "social" issues, the archbishop said. This encyclical explicitly presents the spiritual and theological foundation underlying the pope's message to the Church and the world for the past 12 years — that everything "springs from Christ and his love for all humanity."

Many saints and religious congregations have a special devotion to the Sacred Heart, including St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Society of Jesus, the religious order the saint co-founded and to which Pope Francis belonged.

St. Ignatius' spiritual exercises encourage people to "enter into the heart of Christ" to "enlarge our own hearts" and train them to "sense and savor" the Gospel message and "converse about it with the Lord," the pope wrote.

Pope Francis invited Catholics to rediscover or strengthen their devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the practices connected with it, particularly Eucharistic adoration and receiving the Eucharist on the first Friday of each month.

The First Fridays devotion, he wrote, can help counter "the frenetic pace of today's world and our obsession with free time, consumption and diversion, cell phones and social media (when) we forget to nourish our lives with the strength of the Eucharist."