

Sacred Heart Novena - 31 May to 8 June 2018

HE LOVED WITH A HUMAN HEART

*For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every human being. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice **and loved with a human heart**. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin. – GS 22*

Day 1: Thursday, 31 May, Feast of the Visitation – Rejoice!

Rdgs: Zep 3:14-18, Rom 12:9-16b; Responsorial Psalm: Is 12; Gospel: Lk 1:39-56

Today, we begin our nine day Novena to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Nine days of reflecting together on the Love of God incarnated in Jesus and symbolized by his Sacred Heart. As an overall theme for our reflections in these coming nine days, I have taken an often quoted text from *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), one of the documents from the Second Vatican Council – **Jesus loved with a human heart!** We read in paragraph 22 “By his incarnation, the Son of God united himself in some fashion with every human being. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.”

In this novena, I invite you to reflect with me on the humanity of Jesus, on the human expression of God’s divine love! As we reflect, pray and celebrate the Eucharist together in these nine days leading up to the feast, it is my hope, that each of us, may be gifted with concrete experiences of God’s love. That each of us will be able to say from our own experience that He truly loved with a human heart. It is also my hope that each of us, in experiencing His love, may hear the call to love as He did, and be given the courage to do so.

Today, I organised my reflection around three words/phrases:

REJOICE – GOD WITH US – LOVE MADE FLESH

REJOICE

We are blessed this year to begin this Novena on the Feast of the Visitation of Mary. Today’s feast and today’s readings are exuding with JOY! We see this joy in the baby John the Baptist. When his mother heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leapt in his mother’s womb! Elizabeth felt it. She was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out praising Mary, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” Mary herself felt this joy. She set out...in haste...then in response to Elizabeth’s praise, she praised God saying “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my saviour!”

Why? Why is there so much joy? What is all the excitement about? We all know the answer - JESUS! Because in Jesus, God is in our midst! In the heart of Jesus, God’s heart is beating among us!

GOD WITH US

In the first reading, we hear the prophet Zephaniah exhorting the people of Israel to “Shout for joy...to sing joyfully...to be glad and exult with all your heart.” Why? “For the Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty saviour, he will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in his love.” The psalm expresses the same sentiment “with joy you will draw water from the springs of salvation.” Paul says to the Romans of his day “Rejoice!” I believe the message

for us today, in this Eucharist, in this novena, is the same...REJOICE because GOD is WITH US!

Well sister, you might say, that all sounds very nice but look around you! Look at what is happening in the world today – Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Pacific...people fleeing from their own countries to escape war, violence, poverty and with nowhere to go because the other countries won't or can't accept them; governments killing their own people; crazy leaders here and there; so much destruction in the environment and so much suffering from natural disasters that seem to be bigger and happening more often; people falling victim to the greed of others...the list can go on and on and on. When 2017 ended, many of us wished for a better, more peaceful world for 2018 and today almost halfway through the year, it remains just a wish. Living in this broken and continuously being broken world, how can we rejoice and shout for joy?! How can we claim that God is with us?!

More than 2000 years ago, when the young Miriam of Nazareth visited her cousin Elizabeth, the world was different but in some sense also the same. The people of Israel were not free, they were under Roman occupation. Miriam belonged to a poor family. Members of her family, like other Galileans, were socially, economically, and politically marginalised. There was a lot of violence. They had violent rulers like the Jewish King Herod the Great and the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. Miriam's son Jesus was neither the first nor the last to be crucified by the Romans. People in her time, as in our time, were living in a world continuously being broken. Like us, they probably asked "how can we rejoice and shout for joy?"

Yet it is to them, and to us today, in this church, that the message is given – Rejoice! God, our God who is LOVE, is made flesh in the womb of Mary!

LOVE MADE FLESH

The infant John recognized it and so did his mother. Love is alive, coming to us in haste...Love is in our midst! Is that true, the love of God made flesh is in our midst? Let us look again. There are many organizations with volunteers helping the millions of migrants all over the world. You probably have your own programs in this parish. In my own country where it is said that there are now more than 12,000 people (mostly poor) extra-judicially killed in the government's war on drugs, there are people who help the families left behind (mostly children, now orphans) cope with their loss, buy medicines, food and other basic needs, and work so that justice may be attained. We see on TV, in the news, on the internet, how many people contribute goods and money to help people who are victims of natural disasters. Love made flesh! It is indeed in our midst. There is cause for rejoicing!

As we listen, we also feel this same LOVE asking to be made flesh in our own lives. What brokenness do you see near you? Or maybe in you? How are you being asked to make God's love present in that situation of brokenness?

Today, as we begin our nine-day novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we are reminded that the feast of the Sacred Heart is about God's Love being made flesh in our midst. Jesus is God's love made flesh. Jesus is the face of God's mercy. We are invited not to be mere spectators of the feast, but real active participants of the celebration! God, in his goodness, has decided to share his mission of loving with us. Jesus, in his kindness, has decided to use our hands and feet to reach out to those who suffer, to use our minds to think of solutions to our present day concerns, to use our wills to make decisions to create a better world, and to use our hearts to love those who need his compassion most!

REJOICE because GOD IS WITH US as LOVE MADE FLESH!