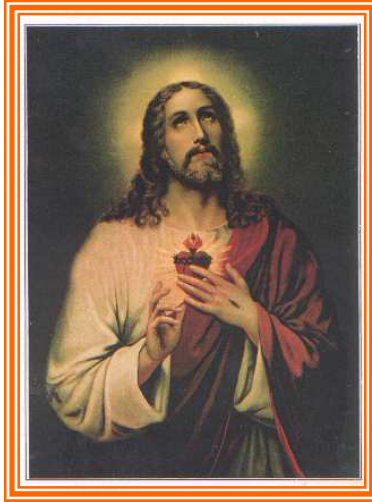


Consecration of the Family to The Sacred Heart



BY REV. M. D. FORREST, M.S.C.

I.

IS AN ACT OF CONSECRATION ONLY A PASSING ACT?

HUMAN words are but the fleeting expression of the thoughts of our mind, the aspirations of our soul, the emotions of our breast. Though our thoughts may be abiding, and our aspirations and sentiments constant, their external manifestation or expression is naturally transient.

Still, it would be quite false to judge of the power of words by the shortness of their duration, for, after their sound has died away, their effect may long remain, indeed, may be eternal. The words which the priest whispers over the bread and wine in the Eucharistic Sacrifice are fleeting, and yet, when the accents of the sacramental form are no longer heard, Christ silently abides beneath the sacred species in obedience to those fleeting words. Likewise, the words of the marriage contract soon pass, but their effect continues to bind husband and wife in a union that can be dissolved only by death. Again, the words of Baptism which the minister of Christ pronounced over us lasted but a few moments, and yet, long after the voice of that priest is hushed, even when his lips are closed in the silence of death, the character of Baptism continues to shine as brightly and freshly in our Christian souls as when our foreheads were still moistened by the regenerating waters. Even the words of Jesus have long since ceased to fall upon mortal ears, but their meaning and their effect are so far-reaching that the Divine Master could emphatically declare that, although heaven and earth would pass, His words would never pass away.

Words, then, naturally pass, but their effect remains. Now, apply this truth to the acts of consecration which Catholics often make in virtue of some special devotion which they cherish. It would be absurd to underrate the value of such acts by the fallacious statement that they are almost meaningless or useless because they are so transitory.

An act of consecration is a solemn act whereby we make a perpetual offering of ourselves—an act the effect of which marks the whole of our lives, and establishes abiding relations between ourselves and the person to whom we are consecrated.

At times, indeed, thoughtless devotees may hastily make some act of consecration, and then live in forgetfulness thereof, but such examples no more militate against the value or efficacy of acts of consecration than the examples of thoughtless people who forget or refuse to pay their lawful debts tell against the validity or binding force of the verbal contract whereby they assumed such obligations of justice.

II. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF CONSECRATING A FAMILY TO THE SACRED HEART?

ALTHOUGH the whole human race, as well as each particular family, and each individual member, belongs by right of creation and redemption to Jesus Christ, we may, nevertheless, voluntarily consecrate ourselves to His Sacred Heart. Pope Leo XIII, in his zeal for the glory of the Heart of Jesus and for the welfare of souls, consecrated mankind to that Divine Heart; many Bishops have likewise consecrated their dioceses; and now the act of consecrating families to the Sacred Heart is proposed to Christian souls as a most salutary practice.

The consecration of a family to the Sacred Heart is the act whereby the father and mother offer themselves and their children to the Heart of Jesus in order to express their resolution of remaining closely united to that Heart of love, of belonging to It perpetually and entirely, and of devoting themselves generously to Its service.

Such an act is full of meaning, for thereby the parents not only acknowledge that Jesus Christ has the right, by creation and redemption, and in virtue of the Sacrament of Matrimony which they have received, to reign over their family, but they also declare and protest that, even if Christ had not already this inalienable right in virtue of those sacred titles, they would freely hand themselves and their children over to His Divine Heart, to be devoted for evermore to Its love and service. Henceforth the family is united to the Heart of Jesus by a new title—the act of perpetual self-oblation which the parents have made of themselves and their children.

III. WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF SUCH AN ACT OF CONSECRATION?

THIS solemn consecration will bring down on the entire family and on each member the choicest blessings. The words of the offering will be wafted heavenwards by the Guardian Angels of the family, and will make sweet music around the throne of Jesus,

Who will dilate His Heart and shed upon the family in richest profusion the graces of which It is the perennial spring. Rather, I should say, that, act of consecration will speed heavenwards like an arrow of prayerful love to pierce the Heart of Jesus, the fountainhead of grace, whence the purest streams of redeeming grace will gush forth to renew and sanctify the Christian family. Special relations, and abiding ones, too, will thence exist between the consecrated family and the Sacred Heart, which will guard the whole family and guide each member onwards and upwards over the winding, narrow,, rugged paths of life unto the vision of the glorified Heart of Jesus in the light of Heaven, and the perpetual ecstatic enjoyment of the measureless love which It sheds upon the elect.

As the result of such a consecration, the Sacred Heart will cherish that family as the object of a special predilection. All! it would need an angel to explain what it is to become the object of such a predilection, and even a celestial spirit could only inadequately express or describe to us such a reality, for in this life our clouded mind, even when deified by the light of faith, beholds but dimly the bright truths of God's love, and only imperfectly grasps the clearest expressions of that. glorious reality.

In virtue, too, of the daily act of devotion which the family will perform before the image of the Sacred Heart, wondrous blessings will be constantly lavished on such a home in fulfilment of the promises which Our Saviour made to St. Margaret Mary.* Could we discern such blessings with the vision of the Guardian Angels of the family, how our hearts would expand with gratitude and beat with intensest delight! Tracing the life of such a family onwards from the moment of its solemn self-oblation made to the Heart of the Crucified, we should see the father protected day after day in his unselfish toil for his wife and children; we should behold the self-sacrificing mother comforted in the trials of which only a mother's loving heart is aware; we should see the little ones snatched from the very jaws of ruthless temptations which would have destroyed their angelic innocence; we should see the most marvellous graces incessantly shining on the paths of the members of that family as celestial lights to guide them onwards, falling gently on their parched and weary souls as heavenly dews to refresh and invigorate them, streaming into their hearts as a supernal nectar to captivate them with the strength and sweetness of Divine love.

And then, when the Angel of Death had snatched a member from that Christian household, night after night, as the family gathered around the image of the Sacred Heart, before which that now absent member once so fervently worshipped with his loved ones, we should behold the glory of God gradually but surely dawning over him in the dark, penal fires of Purgatory, as the pleadings of the consecrated family arose like a sweet-smelling sacrifice to the Throne off the Heart of Jesus.

A certain priest narrated to me a touching incident which he witnessed in his ministrations to the sick. Arriving at the bedside of a dying widowed mother, he beheld five little children, the youngest of whom was but four years of age, each clasping a rosary-beads, and kneeling in pleading prayer around their departing mother. "And surely," added the priest, "if ever a prayer pierced the clouds, the prayers of those little

children did."

We may say that the prayers of a family consecrated to the Heart of Jesus, which the members lovingly pour forth before the image of that Heart, on behalf of a member silently sojourning in the depths of Purgatory, will not only pierce the clouds of Heaven, but the very Heart of God Incarnate, and cause the balm of Divine mercy to descend upon the imprisoned soul and soothe it in its suffering, and shorten its period of expiation.

Oh, no wonder the infallible Vicar of Christ has approved of and blessed the project of consecrating families to the Sacred Heart. Listen to the sweet words of encouragement which his Holiness Benedict XV addressed to Father Mateo Crawley-Boevey, SS.CC., the zealous propagator of this devotion:

"In your zeal for the welfare of human society, you act rightly in stirring up, in the first place, and propagating the Christian spirit in family homes, by establishing in the bosom of our families the charity of Jesus Christ that it may reign therein as a queen. In acting thus, you obey Jesus Christ Himself, Who has promised to shed abroad His blessings on the homes in which an image of His Heart shall be exposed and honoured."

IV.

HOW TO MAKE THIS CONSECRATION

SINCE the consecration of the family to the Sacred Heart is a landmark in the Christian life of the family on its journey towards eternity, this act should be surrounded by all the solemnity and splendour which the circumstances of the family can command. A beautiful framed picture, or a lovely statue, of the Sacred Heart should be procured, and placed in a conspicuous and fitting place, and, if possible, a suitable altar should be erected before it. Some special feast-day should be chosen as the day of consecration, and the children should spend the day in adorning the image and decorating the altar, selecting the choicest flowers, and also procuring neat and even exquisite drapings. These conditions are not, of course, strictly required, and, though they cannot all be fulfilled, the piety of the family will supply for what is wanting in external splendour.

In the evening, at a convenient hour, the father, mother, and children will assemble before the altar of the Sacred Heart, on which a small lamp, or a number of candles, should be lighted as symbols of the living faith and ardent charity of the family; then the father will slowly and distinctly read the consecration, and the members of the family will repeat it after him, sentence by sentence. It would be well if each member of the family had a written or printed copy of the form of consecration; the whole family could then recite it simultaneously. If Our Lord has declared that, where two or three are gathered together in His name, He is there in their midst, how lovingly He will hasten to bless with His presence the family gathered together to honour His Sacred Heart in so special a manner!

Any form of consecration may be used. The following is the official form:

Sacred Heart of Jesus, Who didst manifest to St. Margaret Mary the desire. of reigning in Christian families, we today wish to proclaim Thy most . complete regal dominion over our own. We would live in future with Thy life; we would cause to

flourish in our midst these virtues to which Thou hast promised peace here below; we would banish from us the spirit of the world which Thou hast cursed. And Thou shalt reign over our minds in the simplicity of our faith, and over our hearts by the whole-hearted love with which they shall burn for Thee, the flame of which we shall keep alive by the frequent reception of Thy Divine Eucharist.

Deign, O Divine Heart, to preside over our assemblings, to bless our enterprises, both spiritual and temporal, to dispel our cares, to sanctify our joys, to alleviate our sufferings. If ever one or other of us should have the misfortune to afflict Thee, remind him, O Heart of Jesus, that Thou art good and merciful to the penitent sinner. And when the hour of separation strikes, when death shall come to cast mourning into our midst, we will all, both those who go and those who stay, be submissive to Thy eternal decrees. We will console ourselves with the thought that a day will come when the entire family, reunited in heaven, can sing forever Thy glories and Thy mercies.

May the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the glorious patriarch, St. Joseph, present this consecration to Thee, and keep it in our minds all the days of our life.

All glory to the Heart of Jesus, our King and our Father. Amen.

The act of consecration ended, the family will arise, and each member in turn, commencing with the father, will sign the written formula which the father used while reciting the consecration. This document will thenceforth be carefully kept amongst the family treasures as an abiding proof of the devotedness of the family to the Heart of Jesus.

V. HOW TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO THE SPIRIT OF THIS CONSECRATION

IT is not enough merely to make such an act of consecration; the family must strive henceforth to remain faithful to the spirit of that beautiful oblation made to the Heart of Jesus. As the child whose soul has been stamped with the character of Baptism is obliged to remain faithful to that great sacrament by leading a truly Christian life, as the husband and wife are bound constantly to live according to the solemn promise they made before the altar of God, so the Catholic family is in honour bound to live according to the spirit of its offering to the Sacred Heart.

In perpetual remembrance of their consecration, the father and mother, with all the children, will kneel every night, at a convenient hour, before the altar of the Sacred Heart which they have erected, or before the picture which they have suspended on the wall. Then one member of the family, preferably the father, will recite some act of homage in honour of the Heart of Jesus—the Litany of the Sacred Heart, or the Act of Reparation, or any other prayer or hymn in honour of that Divine Heart. This is, indeed, a simple and easy practice; but we must remember that we please Our Lord more by fidelity in the daily practice of a short act of homage than by an occasional outpouring of endless prayers. We may apply to devotion to the Sacred Heart what St. John Berchmans said on

his deathbed, when asked by his companions what practice was most pleasing to the Mother of God, "Any little act, if only it be constant." Yes, constancy is a characteristic trait of true devotion.

Each daily act of homage rendered to the Sacred Heart by the consecrated family will form a golden step in the ladder that will rise heavenwards from the Christian home; every such act will form a heavenly link in the chain that will stretch across the yawning chasm of eternity to the land of everlasting love. As the family assembles night after night to honour the loving Heart of the Word made flesh, the Guardian Angels of that Christian home will hover over its members, and record in the Book of Life each successive act of honour, of love, and of reparation as it speeds heavenwards to reach the throne of the glorified Heart of Jesus.

After this simple act of homage has been paid to the Divine Heart by the family as a reminder of their previous consecration, and in obedience to its spirit, it would be well for the family to recite together the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin, or, at least, one decade. This, of course, is not, strictly speaking, a necessary addition to the practice of homage to be rendered to the Sacred Heart, but the family Rosary is so beautiful and salutary a devotion, the Virgin Mother is so linked with her Divine Son, and devotion to her is so bound up with devotion to His adorable Heart, that no more opportune practice could be performed after the family have daily manifested their allegiance to that Heart of love.

Where there are children who are not blessed with a Catholic school, the father or mother, or one of the elder members of the family would then do well to instruct the little ones for ten or fifteen minutes in the Catechism.

The unfailling and necessary means to keep, the faith alive in our midst is the Christian instruction of children. The fact that so many young men and young women become negligent of their religious duties as they grow up is frequently, though not invariably, attributed to want of genuine, constant religious instruction in their childhood days. If children are to grow up in the practice of true devotion to the Sacred Heart, which necessarily includes the fulfilment of every religious duty, undoubtedly they must be patiently taught the truth, and shown the beauty, of the divinely established religion which is their supernatural birthright in virtue of the Sacrament of Baptism which they have received. Hence the daily catechetical instruction of the young is earnestly recommended in connection with the daily family worship of the Sacred Heart.

Our Lord will also bless in the most abundant manner the families who are faithful to this custom. If He has promised a special reward to those who give a cup of water to a child in His name, surely He will shower His choicest gifts on those who give the thirsting souls of their little ones to drink copiously of those life-giving waters of heavenly doctrine which flow forth from His Divine Heart. On the contrary, those parents who neglect the religious instruction of the tender souls entrusted to them by Providence will have to give a rigorous account of their stewardship when they are summoned to the tribunal of Eternal Justice.

THE FAMILY AND THE EUCHARISTIC HEART

WITH the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the Home is closely associated Family Devotion to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus. Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament is inseparable from Devotion to the Sacred Heart; an ardent, tender devotion to the Sacrament of Love is, in fact, the living fruit of this devotion, as is clear from the beautiful Office and Mass which Pope Benedict XV approved in honour of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus.

The invitatory (or opening exhortation) of the Office reads thus: "Come, let us adore the Heart of Jesus giving us the Most Holy Eucharist." And the lessons of the second Nocturne, which explain the feast, are taken from the writings of St. Alphonsus Liguori:

"O, if it were only given us to comprehend the love that burns in the Heart of Jesus for us! He has so loved us that, if all men and angels united their power of loving, they would not attain a thousandth part of the love with which He cherishes us. The love of Jesus for us immeasurably exceeds our love for ourselves; He has loved us beyond all measure... That love impelled Him to remain with us in the Blessed sacrament as on a kingly throne of charity. For there He lives under the species of bread, enclosed in a tabernacle, stripped of His majesty, motionless and deprived of the use of His bodily senses, so that He seems to do nothing there but love men. Love desires the perpetual presence of the beloved, and therefore Jesus has remained with us in the Most Holy Sacrament. To our most loving Saviour thirty-three years seemed too brief a period to dwell with men on earth, and, therefore, in order to satisfy His desire to remain with us perpetually, He seemed to find it necessary to work the greatest miracle of all and to institute the Sacrament of the Blessed Eucharist. The work of Redemption had already been accomplished; men had already been reconciled with God; why, then, has Our Lord remained in this Sacrament? He has remained because He could not bear to leave us, for, as He has testified, His delights are to be with us. Indeed, that love constrained Him to become also the food of our souls, to unite Himself to us, so that our hearts and His might become but one: 'He that eateth My flesh abideth in Me and I in him.' O stupendous prodigy, O excess of God's love for us!

"From the most loving Heart of Jesus all the sacraments have indeed come forth, but especially the Sacrament of Love proceeded thence in order that He might thereby be our companion through life, the food of our souls, and our sacrifice of infinite value."

Every member of a family consecrated to the Sacred Heart will be lovingly impelled to practise special worship of the Holy Eucharist by frequently visiting Our Lord in the Tabernacle, often assisting at the spotless Sacrifice, and regularly receiving Holy Communion. And it would be a splendid and beautiful practice for all the members to unite, from time to time, at the Holy Table and together receive our Eucharistic King.

This practice will not conflict with Sodality Communions. By all means let each member of the family receive Holy Communion as a Child of Mary, as a member of the Sacred Heart Sodality, or as a soldier of the Holy Name Society. But, at stated times, e.g., on the fifth Sunday of a month, or on some great festival that occurs on a week day, the

entire family could regularly approach the altar-rails and fervently receive Holy Communion as a family. This sweet practice of Family Communion would surely be the source of most abundant blessings.

SUMMARY

The Consecration of the Family to the Sacred Heart will unite the family most intimately with the Heart of Jesus, will insure the constant blessing and protection of that Divine Heart, and will establish abiding relations between the Christian home and the Fountainhead of Grace, whence copious streams will perennially flow over the family to purify and sanctify each member in its earthly pilgrimage and assuage its suffering in the realm of silent expiation; while fidelity to the simple practices recommended will mean the unceasing worship of the Heart of Jesus, unflinching devotion to the Mother of God, incessant growth of the souls of children in the supernatural life by means of Christian doctrine, and a rich outpouring of choicest gifts on the whole family and each member from the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus.

"MAY THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS BE EVERYWHERE LOVED."

PROMISES

Made by Our Lord Jesus Christ to Saint Margaret Mary in favour of those who practise devotion to His Sacred Heart.

1. I will give them all the graces necessary for their state in life.
2. I will establish peace in their families.
3. I will console them in all their difficulties.
4. I will be their secure refuge during life, and especially at death.
5. I will shed abundant blessings upon all their undertakings.
6. Sinners shall find in My Heart a fountain and boundless ocean of mercy.
7. Tepid souls shall become fervent.
8. Fervent souls shall rise speedily to great perfection.
9. I will bless every house in which the picture of My Sacred Heart shall be exposed and honoured.
10. I will give priests the power of touching the hardest hearts.
11. Those who propagate this devotion shall have their names written in My Heart, and they shall never be effaced.
12. I promise thee, in the excessive mercy of My Heart, that My all-powerful love will grant to all those who receive Holy Communion on the First Friday of every month for nine consecutive months, **THE GRACE OF FINAL PERSEVERANCE: THEY SHALL NOT DIE UNDER MY DISPLEASURE** nor without receiving the sacraments, and My Divine Heart shall be their safe refuge in that last hour.
