

WORDS OF

L O V E

FROM THE SACRED HEART

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE SACRED HEART,

Many years ago when I was in the Novitiate, I picked up a small book with a somewhat intriguing title called **To Know How to Wait**. It was printed in the style of the Diary of Saint Faustina, with numbered entries and random thoughts written in a day by day manner. My eye fell on some interesting offerings from this little book and I made a mental note to find out more about the person who wrote it. He turned out to be an obscure Trappist monk whose reflections were quite inspirational to me. As the years passed, I sometimes came back to this small book and then after a good number of years went by, I learned that its author was going to be canonized by the Church. So, others I mused, had also seen the merit of his hidden life and simple, yet profound ponderings.

Now for those of you who get the **Magnificat** magazine and turn to page 413 of the November issue, you will meet the saint that I am taking about: Saint Rafael Arnaiz Baron. He truly had a rather uneventful life. on the exterior, that is. He admits in this brief summary that "his novitiate was repeatedly interrupted by trips home for medical treatment." He had his struggles and confesses: "My prayer was not good. I neither pray nor meditate nor do my lectio well. At work... I hardly work: when I eat and sleep, I do nothing else -- eat and sleep like a little animal. I cannot go on that way." But we are told, he did persevere, even though he could not take vows and remained an oblate on the periphery of the community for the rest of his short life (dying at the age of 27).

The quote from his writings is very moving: "Every day I am happier in my complete abandonment into his hands. I see his will even in the most insignificant and tiny things that happen. In everything I find a lesson that serves to make me understand better his mercy toward me. I love his designs with my whole being, and that is enough."

I think the beautiful spiritual lessons of Saint Rafael are there to remind us of the constant, ongoing movements that take place in each soul that wishes to progress deeper into the heart of God. It is a journey that does not fail to embrace purification, refinement, hidden growth. Through means not always of our own choosing or making, God urges us toward something that is better. Most times, however, there is an inner force inside of us that is resistant because our natural tendency is to fight against this process rather than surrender to it. Our stubborn, unredeemed spirits rebel against such impulses, assuring us that we don't need another's help, no matter who it is! God knows this, and so his first words to us are so carefully chosen, so inviting, so appealing: "I will allure her into the desert and speak to her heart." Or as we will hear in the liturgy of Advent: "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, that her slavery has ended, her sin is forgiven, her punishment over and done." The first words which God speaks to us are meant to penetrate into our hardened hearts and soften them up. Notice that God is not speaking to us about superficial things but about what really matters in life. God is interested in speaking the language of the heart, the language that touches most deeply into our psyche, our mind, our spirit. God is alluring us into the unsafe realm of relationship. It is done so irresistibly at first that it is hard to say no. While we wonder, God is there, waiting for us to make our first move, to take that tiny step toward Him.

If or when this germination of God's word take place in us, a new phase of growth begins. Now as we grow toward the Light, it is necessary to watch carefully so that nothing impedes our progress. God may seem to be saying to us: "You must do it this way, don't grow there, only like this." The loving hand of God has somehow gotten tough. We now hear the words: "When you seek to enter the Lord's service, be prepared to be chastened." God begins to offer us a drastic diet to curtail any of our wayward inclinations: things like the serious practice of prayer, spiritual reading, daily examination of conscience, good works. We are encourage to hunger for the things of God and exhorted to avoid those that will dissipate the Spirit. Above all, we are counseled to remain steadfast in our commitment to God, sinking the roots of our being ever deeper into his Sacred Heart while waiting for the voice of God to speak.

I am convinced that once we open ourselves to being receptive to God, words will be spoken in the depths of our hearts that will come from the very Word of Life itself. God desires pure vessels to hold this Word, however. That is perhaps why we cannot assume to act as witnesses and spokespersons on behalf of the Lord , unless we ourselves first undergo a transformation of grace. Not that we will ever be totally faultless. We see the example in the life of Saint Rafael of how God allows us to experience our constant weaknesses so that we may remember his infinite mercies.

So the words of self-scrutinization which rise up in our conscience should help us to cast ourselves more readily on the mercy of God and the loving tenderness of his heart. The sense of compunction, or sorrow for our sins and failures, needs to be expressed without a paralyzing guilt. Even in monasteries this is true. In an insightful book written about how monks confront death, one Father Abbot was heard to say, "The monks who do well are those who know that we are all a little damaged. In a monastery, we often have a little account to settle with normality."

Yet in spite of the fact that we are all flawed, God loves us. He so wants to call us back, to wipe away the darkness from our souls, if we turn his way. As we each move in our Advent journey closer to the reality of knowing and loving God more, we find a corresponding desire to speak of God's merciful deeds, not only in the past but in the present. We become proclaimers of the Kingdom in the here and now of today's world. In this capacity it may also be possible for us to gently touch the hearts of others through a small act of charity. Or quite possibly we may experience the cost involved in this task through those who actively scorn the practice of our faith and sometimes even persecute us.

What we have received as a gift, we must give as a gift. The unfathomable riches of the Heart of Christ are being poured out, bidding us to be transformed by their powerful graces and missioning us to spread these riches to others. "Speak on my behalf," the Heart of Christ tells those who adore his Heart, and let the world know that I am here among you, in your very presence. Seek me and you will find me. Yes, even in the most drastic of circumstance the word of love from Christ's sacred heart will aid us, will guide us, will direct us and save us from the 'terrors of the night'. In a book that was once read in our refectory (where we eat our meals) a story was told of the survivors of a Nazi concentration camp. Upon their liberation by American troops one group of Polish women were found to be in relatively good physical condition. Asked how they coped with such suffering, one woman gave the reason. "We lived on our faith and hope," she said, drawing out of her pocket a homemade rosary which she had secretly made for herself. Instead of eating her meager ration of watery soup and a piece of black bread, she fashioned the bread into small beads and scavenging for a string she devised the decades of a rosary. Finding a pen she twisted it into a cross and completed her spiritual treasure. At the day's end when all the guards were gone, she and her fellow inmates recited the rosary imploring the Mother of God to help them in their trials.

The more we seek to dwell in the goodness of the Lord's heart, the more our life choices align with the values and virtues of that Heart, the more will God's light and wisdom and love be instilled into the fabric of our beings. Our words, whether they be spoken with gentle persuasion or firm conviction will then have a transcendent force capable of transmitting something of the Divine Goodness and Truth. They will communicate an enduring life-giving impression around us because they will have originated from the very source of Love itself. They will be beacons of vision, hope and courage destined to draw others more intimately into the very core of God's divine heart. AMEN. +

This talk on Sacred Heart Spirituality was given in our Gathering Room on December 1st, 2019. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the Sisters, our next talks will be held on Sunday, February 2nd, 2020 at 4:00 p.m.