

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Severity versus Mercy Solemnity of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque; Solemnity of the Dedication of St. Margaret Mary Church Friday, October 16, 2015 8:15 AM
Eph 3:14-19; **Mt 11:25-30** (St. Hedwig) (Human beings need to listen to the real word of God and respond to it with open and generous hearts, with hearts that are willing to be ignited in the love of God.)

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves.”

Today, as I mentioned, we celebrate in this parish the solemnity of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. **St. Margaret was a very troubled woman, and she grew up in a very troubled age.** Isn't every age troubled by something? There was a very prominent religious movement in the Church of her day that is called **Jansenism**.

Jansenism comes from, the name comes from a bishop in Belgium, Cornelius Jansenius. But he doesn't really matter, but **what matters is that in the Church at every age there's always something. And at the root of the problem of all biblical religion is a sort of conflict between the word of God and life as we see it.** So in the Old Testament we see or hear the word of God tell us that God is just and God will reward the just but punish the evil, the unjust; but we don't see a world where the evil are punished readily, where the good are exonerated, promoted, or rewarded. We don't see that. So there is a problem, a conflict.

In the New Testament God is love, but we don't see a world full of love. So what gives? Well, the way people deal with this conflict is to say, well, God is love, God is just, but people are bad. The world is the way it is because people are bad. That may not be the right answer. It may be that people are stupid or people are ignorant or people are weak. Those are equally good answers. But that's not the answer that **the Jansenists had. Their answer was people were bad, unworthy, untrustworthy.** Well, there's some truth in this; at least half of the people in the world probably aren't so good. And weakness is a kind of lack of trust.

But **the gospels stress the mercy of God, and how the mercy of God wants to lift up the weak, heal the infirmed, convert the evil, convert the malicious, change around the depraved.** That's the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's not always heard because there are these

people that have made a great effort to be good and to follow the law of God and all this, which is praiseworthy; but then they really think that those who haven't should not enjoy God's blessings. That isn't the gospel. **The gospel is God wants everyone to be saved and everyone to enjoy the blessings, even though for many it requires a profound change, radical turn of heart, a penetrating new way of thinking.** And that doesn't always happen in our observation. We don't see it. **Whether it happens after death or not, we don't know.** We don't know anything about how everything turns out. This is all a matter of faith and hope. **The word of God proposes to us a new day, a new possibility, a new kingdom,** a vision of a God wholly good, wholly loving, full of mercy, desiring a better world than we have made with our free will. **Whether the obstacles are primarily deliberate or not, voluntary or not, conscious or not, in our control or not, that is all secondary.**

St. Margaret Mary received visions in her pain, and she was a very pained woman. She cut herself. People who cut themselves are really their own enemies, obviously. There is something in themselves they find hateful and they are trying to destroy it. Well, Margaret Mary was like that, but God moved in her life in a very extraordinary way and brought her **revelations, visitations, visions of his love for her and his love for all. The image of the Sacred Heart—she didn't invent it.** It didn't start with her. It had been in the Church for a long time; it goes back to the Middle Ages. But God used that image of a human heart full of love and bleeding, which is an image of the Cross, **used that to remedy the severity of Catholicism in the age of Margaret Mary, the seventeenth century.**

Now however it's remedied in one era, it has to be remedied in the next, because people are people. **And one of the weaknesses of human nature is severity.** It often poses as holiness or righteousness or goodness, but it isn't, because holiness and righteousness and goodness has to be like God, and God isn't severe. So **it's a false holiness.** That's what Margaret Mary was opposing, a false holiness. And we have to oppose it as well. This story simply gets retold in a different way in every age, but it's the same story: how **human beings need to listen to the real word of God and respond to it with open and generous hearts, with hearts that are willing to be ignited in the love of God.**