

Image of the Sacred Heart **St. Margaret Mary Alacoque**, virgin, **Parish Patroness**

Sunday, October 16, 2016 10:45 AM Sir 2:7-13; Phil 3:8-14; **Jn 15:1-8**

(Our “parish with heart,” has a similar mission to stir up in the hearts of the faithful a love that can touch the hearts of others who have grown cold or indifferent to the very concerns that make us human.)

This is our parish’s thirty-third anniversary, and I would ask all those who are original members of the parish to stand. Thank you. I think you will all admit, we who are not original members, that they did a wonderful job of getting us going. But now there is a lot of work still to be done. And the **work still to be done I believe relates directly to our patroness, St. Margaret Mary**, because every Christian is given certain gifts or charisms and **the saints are precisely those men and women who really took their gifts seriously and who spent their lives developing them**. And when a saint becomes a patron or patroness of a parish, for example, **that parish shares in the charism of its patron**.

Now in the case of Margaret Mary, her charism was bound up with the image of the Sacred Heart and the whole meaning behind that devotion. Perhaps you are aware or not that in the history of our world and of what we might call world religion the most common image of God is a supreme being so grand, so high, so lofty that he, she, or it has no particular concern for the lives of mortals. That is the attitude that is actually extremely common outside of Christianity and sadly has entered into Christianity in the lives of many people who think of themselves as believers. So if we put ourselves in the shoes of those who do not know God or who are very unsure of what God is like or God’s attitude toward them, we could see why the image of the Sacred Heart, which is the image of a human heart and of course **it’s the human heart of Jesus beating with real concern and anxiety for us and everyone and the whole of creation**. It’s very powerful.

Now St. Margaret Mary lived in a very awful time, not that every time doesn’t have its own forms of awfulness, but her time was especially awful. She was born one year before the end of the **Thirty Years War**, one of the bloodiest wars in the history of Europe. In thirty years eight million people were slaughtered, and it was **Christian versus Christian in the so-called war of religion**, prompted by controversies that arose after the Protestant Reformation, and of course abetted by all kinds of political and land-grabbing ulterior motives. But it was an awful time. And it was **a time in which Christianity itself was really foundering**. The whole controversy between faith and works, for example, sadly ignores the most important thing of all, as St. Paul says, love. It’s the greatest gift. **How could people become so angry and prideful that they could overlook this fundamental truth that God justifies and sanctifies his people through his love?** How could they forget that? But they did. It’s a fact of history.

And one way God had of responding to this horrible situation was to urge a return to the basis of Christian faith through the encouragement of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, Jesus loving and caring for and anxious about his beloved people that was busy annihilating itself. The parallels to the present age are many, especially the willingness of many people to slaughter others in the name of God. No, that idea didn’t come originally from Sunnis and Shiites.

It is always necessary if we want to be rooted in truth, to listen to the Holy Spirit and to utilize the images the Holy Spirit offers us. Closely related to the image of the Sacred Heart, which actually is not in Scripture, per se, is the image of the vine that Terry read about this morning according to the Gospel of John. **The image of the vine stresses the fact that we cannot have individual lives apart from others.** If a branch is severed from a vine, it withers and dies. That is true of each of us as well. There is only one life that we all share, and it is the life of God. And **the life of God flows through humanity** much as life flows through a vine reaching every individual branch. The illusion of being separate beings is a great deception, although we all have it. We all fall into it. And it has defined the world as it has developed over centuries. **So the mission of Margaret Mary Alacoque was to bring a new vision to people, a new vision of divine reality into the hearts and minds of common people devastated by decades of war and bloodshed.**

Today our parish is called, rightly, **“a parish with heart,”** and we have **a similar mission to stir up in the hearts of the faithful a love that can touch the hearts of others who have grown cold or indifferent to the very concerns that make us human.** Why? Well, partly because of the pressure of living in a loveless world, partly because of the speed with which everything changes so that all beliefs seem uncertain: What can we be sure of? And certainly changes in the world seem to have dashed all our hopes and dreams. And people find it very hard not to fall into despair. **But maybe they’ve never heard—maybe they’ve never heard—God’s hopes and dreams for a new heaven and a new earth, for a kingdom of truth and justice.** Maybe they’ve never heard of this. And that’s where we come in. **That is what our parish is for: to extend God’s work into this world of shadows and despair.** What if our parish succeeded in becoming the change we seek in the world?