

Sacred
Heart
of Jesus



PRAYER BOOK

Sacred Heart of Jesus Prayer Book

Written and compiled by
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Half-title page art: Stained-glass window of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, photo by Mary Emmanuel Alves, FSP.



Introduction

What is the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus? It is a way of honoring Jesus under the symbol of his Heart, which represents love. This devotion is all about love—first, Jesus’ great love for us, and then the love we give to him in return. In one of her letters, Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque wrote that we should ask Jesus to replace our hearts with his. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is about responding to the love of Jesus by making our hearts as loving as his. Isn’t that the essence of the Gospel? As Saint Paul expresses it: “The love of Christ urges us on” (2 Cor 5:14).

This devotion is meant to change our hearts. How can this happen? It happens when we allow Jesus to enter our hearts. He invites us: “I am standing at the door and knocking. If you hear my voice

and open the door, I'll come in to you and eat with you, and you with me" (Rv 3:20). But what does it mean to open our hearts to Jesus? In another letter, Saint Margaret Mary explains this. She said that the Heart of Jesus is like an inexhaustible fountain from which three streams flow. One is a stream of mercy for sinners, calling them to sorrow and repentance; the second is a stream of love for those who are burdened by some need; and the third is a stream of love and light for Jesus' "perfect friends." As you read this book, you may find you can relate more to one of these three groups. So let's look at each for a moment.

1. A stream of mercy for sinners.

All of us are sinners; all of us have committed sins we need to repent of in order to be reconciled to God. As we go through life, we can find ourselves getting farther from Jesus or nearer to him. Perhaps you have already gone through a major conversion in your life. It may be that you are already a committed disciple and are trying to get

closer to the Lord. But perhaps you are at a point where you need a major conversion, or you are burdened by some sin that you think is so terrible that God can never forgive it. If so, do not fear to draw near to Jesus with great confidence. As long as we repent, God will forgive us no matter what we have done. After Jesus died on the Cross, a soldier pierced his Heart and blood and water flowed out (see Jn 19:34). That blood and water represents the stream of divine mercy, the cleansing waters of Baptism and Penance. When we repent and come near to Jesus, he washes us clean from all of our sins. No one should fear to approach him. As he himself said, “whoever comes to me I will not send away” (Jn 6:37).

2. A stream of love for those in need.

When life is difficult we can turn with trust to Jesus. He said: “Come to me, all you grown weary and burdened, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble hearted, and you will find rest for your

souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light” (Mt 11:28–30). Maybe we have heard those words many times, read in the Gospel at Mass. If you have some heavy burden—the death of a loved one, illness, rejection, unemployment, family troubles, depression—go to Jesus and entrust that burden to his Sacred Heart. He will help you.

3. A stream of love and light for Jesus’ “perfect friends.”

Don’t let the term “perfect friend” scare you. Saint Margaret Mary used the term to describe her spiritual director, Saint Claude de la Colombière, and any of us who are sincerely striving for holiness. “I no longer call you servants, because the servant does not know what his lord does. I have called you friends because everything I have heard from the Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me; on the contrary, I chose you” (Jn 15:15–16). “Perfect” here simply means that we are trying our best to live our lives with Jesus at our side. We all have our human imperfections and failings. But Jesus helps us to keep on growing in love, so that we

may share his love with others and advance the kingdom of God.

Whatever stage you are at right now, this book can help you grow more deeply in love with Jesus and experience the love of his Sacred Heart.

The History of Devotion to the Sacred Heart

Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque is well known as one of the most ardent promoters of devotion to the Sacred Heart. But it did not originate with her. In fact, we could even say it began with Jesus himself when he invited us to rest in his Heart. This invitation to find rest in the merciful Heart of Jesus has consoled Christians throughout the centuries.

Many Church writers have spoken about the love of Jesus in reference to his Heart. This devotion developed as the Church meditated on the love of Jesus and gradually came to understand it better. In the Middle Ages, saints like Bernard of Clairvaux and Albert the Great preached and wrote about the Heart of Jesus. This text from the Gospel of John in particular gave them much to meditate on:

So the soldiers came and they broke the legs of the first one and then of the other who had been crucified with him, but when they came to Jesus and saw that he had already died, they did not break his legs, but, instead, one of the soldiers stabbed him in the side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. And the one who saw it has borne witness and his witness is true, and he knows that he is speaking the truth so you, too, may believe. For these things happened so the Scripture might be fulfilled, “Not a bone of his shall be broken.” And again another Scripture says, “They shall look on him whom they have pierced.” (Jn 19:32–37)

In the blood and water that flowed from the Heart of Jesus, Christian writers saw the symbols of Baptism and the Eucharist. The great gift of the sacraments flowed from Jesus’ Heart. Saint John Chrysostom wrote, “Since the sacred mysteries derive their origin from thence, when you draw near to the awe-inspiring chalice, so approach as if you were going to drink from Christ’s own side.” In light of all this, it is clear that devotion to the Sacred Heart is deeply rooted in Scripture and Catholic tradition.

It was through Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–1690), however, that the devotion went viral, so to speak. She was a cloistered nun from the Visitation convent at Paray-le-Monial, France. Jesus appeared to her several times and revealed to her how much he loved her and all people. He spoke of his desire that people would love him in return, and, for this purpose, he wanted Margaret Mary to spread devotion to his Sacred Heart.

In the cloister she had little or no contact with the outside world; how was she to do what Jesus asked? The Lord himself gave her the means through a holy Jesuit priest, Saint Claude de la Colombière, who was her spiritual director. He realized that Margaret Mary's charity, humility, and obedience reflected true holiness. Convinced that she was telling the truth, he asked her to write an account of her revelations. He himself began to preach about Jesus' love for us in his Sacred Heart.

Through Margaret Mary, Jesus requested that we honor his Sacred Heart by fervently receiving Holy Communion, especially on the First Friday of the month, and offering reparation for sins. Jesus

also requested that a special feast day be established to honor his Sacred Heart. In 1765 the feast was officially observed in Poland, and in 1856 Pope Pius IX extended it to the universal Church.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is more than merely a devotion; it is the essence of the Gospel: to take on the Heart of Jesus, live in his love, and bring that love to others. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says:

Jesus knew and loved us each and all during his life, his agony and his Passion, and gave himself up for each one of us: “The Son of God . . . loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). He has loved us all with a human Heart. For this reason, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pierced by our sins and for our salvation (cf. Jn 19:34) “is quite rightly considered the chief sign and symbol of that . . . love with which the divine Redeemer continually loves the eternal Father and all human beings” without exception. (CCC 478, quoting Pope Pius XII, encyclical *Haurietis Aquas*)