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“My heart is overwhelmed” (Hosea 11:8).

Hos 11:1,3-4, 8c-9; Eph 3:8-12, 14-19; John 19:31-39

Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

The readings for today’s solemnity affirm that it is not the power of Jesus but his human vulnerability and suffering that make him approachable and lovable to believers. He is one of us. He came for us. He gave himself for us. He loved us to the very end.

If there is a heartbreaking moment in the Gospels, it is the scene in John’s Gospel when Jesus hangs lifeless on the cross before his mother, the other women, and the disciple he loved. Even in death, the cold, efficient cruelty of his executioners does not cease. To ensure he is dead, a soldier thrusts a spear into his side to pierce the heart. It is either that or break his legs, as they do with clubs to the others to stop their efforts to stand on the nails to breathe, thus hastening suffocation.

For the witnessing evangelist, these indignities only fulfill the Scriptures; “They will look on him whom they have pierced” (Zechariah 12), and “Not a bone shall be broken” (Psalm 34). And most telling of all, from his pierced side flow blood and water, symbols of finality and new beginnings, the gift of the church, born of baptism and the Eucharist, the gift of the Holy Spirit, breathed forth in a final triumphant shout: “Accomplished!”

Even risen and in glory, the Christ who returns to his disciples retains the wounds of his death. His hands and feet are pierced, his heart is exposed. No one who comes to Jesus will ever be able to say, “You cannot understand my suffering and loss, or fathom my sense of rejection, betrayal and abandonment.” He has gone the distance and redeemed even the lost who think they have outrun God’s mercy.

All of this is mystery, of course, and no amount of theology will penetrate the self-emptying God whose love for sinners is everlasting and inexhaustible. When we need such infinite love, where else can we go except to the God of mercy revealed by Jesus with his own self-emptying sacrifice? Ephesians invites us to open our lives as a “dwelling place in faith” where Christ will find a home. There we will be “grounded in love and have the strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which

surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

This heart to heart, face to face encounter is available to everyone because Jesus brought God from heaven to earth, from eternity into history. When we pray, it is a local call, made within the dwelling place we share with Jesus, more intimate than our own thoughts, as close as our next breath and heartbeat. His Sacred Heart makes this holy ground for both of us.

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