

At St. Mary Hospital, across the street, one of my first orders of the day - right around 6:00 am - in the morning - is to visit pre-op; where patients are prepared and wait before surgeries. Of particular note are the open-heart patients, whom I make a point to get to first ... just in case they want to see a priest before their surgery.

Historically, the first open heart surgeries took place in the late 19th century - right around 1895. And in the past one-hundred-and-some years, the survivability of these previously risky surgeries has reached upwards of 95%.

And still, patients and their families still remain concerned. That's why open heart patients are at the top of my list every morning. So that they may receive the grace of the Sacraments, and the consolation of prayer - in a time of uncertainty and worry.

Today is the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Devotions to Our Lord's Sacred Heart appear as early as the 11th century; yet it wasn't until the 17th century visions of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, that the devotion took on its present form and popularity - focusing on personal consecration and reparation for sin.

In today's Gospel, we hear St. John's description of the piercing of Our Lord's heart following His death on Calvary.

There are two observations that I would like to offer for our reflection.

The first is in relation to Our Lady.

The Holy Mother of God, having watched her Son's passion and slow death on the cross over the past several hours - is most likely exhausted herself. And yet just when it looks like the worst is over ... in an act of intense cruelty, we hear that a soldier thrusts a lance ... tearing into Our Lord's heart.

Imagine that - your only Child has suffered enormously ... and one of His torturers decides to make a statement ... to ensure that the victim is dead enough to satisfy the hatred of those who condemned Him.

One can only guess that Mary's Immaculate Heart must have skipped a beat as she gasped with horror at witnessing such a merciless act.

And, my dear friends, our negligence in regards to our duties can be compared to this cruelty. When we choose ourselves over Christ, or the world over Christ - love of anything else except for love of Christ - we aid in striking that final cruel blow.

The second is in relation to St. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved; who only a few hours before reclined at table with Our Lord and rested his head on our Lord's chest - listening to ... and hearing the strong rhythm of that Heart - so full of Divine love for humanity ... but now John witnesses the painful confirmation that the Heart of Christ has most certainly stopped beating.

This act can be likened to our own willful distraction from the Love of the Divine Son of God for all of us. When we fail to recognize and acknowledge His love for us - it is as if we have turned our backs ... as if we have become deaf ... to the beating of His Sacred Heart.

And yet in this final shocking event of Our Lord's suffering - the ultimate Victory remains for God alone. Because instead of this violence against Christ's love for humanity being the last word ... the Eternal Word of God cannot be silenced ... and Our Lord in silence speaks His final word.

Blood and water pour out of the wound torn in His side. His heart - no longer beating - gushes forth water - to Baptize an unworthy world into the inner life of the Godhead. And His Blood - His Most Precious Blood - the universal Sign of life - is poured out to

nourish the Divine life in humanity, which so needs this grace to fill the emptiness in our own hearts and souls.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus calls us all to take a risk - to face a life-and-death proposition ... a moment filled with perceived dangers - dangers to our pride and our neglect ... dangers to our willfulness and our worldliness. Yet the small risk we take in turning toward ... and loving God ... provides us with an infinite return on our small investment.

As we recite the Creed in a few moments, let us reflect on our own Baptism - let us see ourselves bathed in the water pouring forth from His side. And as we receive Him in the Eucharist, may His Precious Blood fill us and strengthen us against our shortcomings and failings.

On this Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, let us be drawn ever deeper into the Heart of the Most Holy Trinity - to live the life we are called to in Baptism; and to be nourished at this table so that we may go forth to spread the Gospel in boldness and in truth.