This month's Liturgy; June 2018

In devotion, this month of June is associated with the Sacred Heart of Jesus (the Solemnity this year falling at the beginning of the month, Friday 8th June). It was Pope Pius IX who, in 1856, extended the liturgical celebration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the universal Church, but naturally its imagery and appeal goes back much further. It was in the Middle Ages that a devotion to the physical heart of Christ, the center and seat of human emotion and love, became a common theme in the writings of Saints such as Bonaventure and Bernard of Clairvaux, Julian of Norwich and Gertrude – yet we need only read Saint Paul's letter to the Romans, and especially the Gospel of Saint John, to see how close to the Christian mind and spirituality is the image of Christ's loving heart, the sign and symbol of the Lord's self-giving.

We are invited to enter more deeply into the mystery which is the love of God. Love is the heart of the Mystery of the Trinity, love is the example and command of Christ in the Eucharist, love is the content and theme of the particular Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Yet it is always a love which is not content to be inward-looking or selfish but which, of its very nature, wants to be open to others, to be shared with others;

'My dear people, since God has loved us so much, we too should love one another...' (1 John 4:9)

These themes are gathered together in the words of the Preface which will be prayed on the Feast; the wounded heart of Jesus is the fount of all graces and blessings in the sacramental life of the Church – because the Sacraments are given to us that the life of God, and his love in us, may be strengthened and deepened day by day;

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For raised up on the Cross
he gave himself up for us with a wonderful love
and poured out Blood and water from his pierced side,
the wellspring of the Church's Sacraments
so that, won over to the open Heart of the Saviour,
all might draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation.

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Father Philip