

- In the past two days the Church has celebrated two of her most endearing feasts: the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus on Friday, and the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary yesterday.
- These two feasts lovingly remind us that Our Lord's Sacred Heart and His mother's Immaculate Heart are always open to one and all. They remind us of what Our Lord and His Immaculate Mother have suffered out of their love for us.
- In the Church's piety we view the Sacred Heart of Jesus as the physical embodiment of Christ's unfathomable love for all mankind. We understand His Sacred Heart to be the very fount of His love and mercy and the source of the sacramental life of the Church.
- It's the Sacred Heart of Jesus that we find when we approach our Lord in the Eucharist. From that Heart, wounded out of love for sinful man, ushers forth a torrent of love and mercy that purifies, strengthens, heals, and sanctifies us!
- From that Heart comes a burning flame of love – a fire that burns away the dross of our sinfulness so that we can shine with the glory of holiness and virtue.
- The Immaculate Heart of Mary burns as well, but with the fire of a perfectly pure maternal love. Hers is a heart filled with compassion and understanding for her wayward children. Hers is a heart that cannot help but love us, even when we act in unloving ways.
- While Jesus' Sacred Heart was cruelly torn open by the centurion's lance, Our Lady's Immaculate Heart was pierced not physically, but interiorly by the sorrows she endured. These two hearts of Jesus and Mary are in perfect union with one another.
- While the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the living symbol of God's love for mankind, the Immaculate Heart of Mary is the icon of the pure love each of us is to bear for God.
- Her Immaculate Heart shows us how to love God purely, completely, and with a willingness to both ponder the mysteries of life, and to suffer all that we must in order to fulfill God's holy will, as did our Blessed Lady.
- Today's readings speak of God's tender love for man. St. Paul writes in the 2nd reading: "God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us." Is there anything more remarkable than the truth expressed in this line of Scripture?
- Or think about what we hear in today's Gospel: "At the sight of the crowds, Jesus' heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd."
- What are we to learn from our readings? That God's love for us is unconditional. It doesn't matter who we are or what we've done. God's mercy is available to us all.
- Of course, while Christ died for all of us, He does not force His love on us. Yet His love is so perfect, so overwhelming, so fantastic that it requires some response from us.
- Last Sunday I spoke about the sort of spiritual *transubstantiation* that must take place within each of us to be in true communion with God.
- Just as bread and wine are *transubstantiated* at Mass to become the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, the old man of sin that reigns within all of us must die so that we can be interiorly transformed into the new man of grace and virtue.
- We must turn away from our sinful actions as best we can and do what is right in God's eyes. We have to try and live a life of integrity. But even more than just avoiding sin, we must be faithful to the covenant God formed with us at our baptism.

- The great sign of this covenant we have with God is Holy Communion. Just as a husband and wife give themselves fully to each other through the marital act, Christ gives Himself fully to us in the Eucharist: body, blood, soul and divinity.
- When we come forward to receive Holy Communion, we signal to God our desire to be in covenant with Him. Indeed, every time we receive Communion, we are renewing the promises of our covenant with God, just as man and wife do through the nuptial act.
- And when we say “Amen” – “I believe” – as the Host is presented to us, we’re saying that not only do we believe that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist, but also that we believe all that our Lord teaches us through His Catholic Church and wish to abide by it.
- Thus we have to strive with all our hearts to always be reconciled with God, to hearken to His voice, to be faithful to our covenant with Him by obeying His teachings. And we must receive Holy Communion with integrity, worthily and reverently.
- Understand, then, that if you don’t believe all that the Church teaches or if you’re not truly living in communion with the Church, you should not receive. Or if you have committed a grave sin and haven’t gone to confession, do not receive Holy Communion.
- Whenever we receive Holy Communion in an unworthy manner, we make a mockery of God’s mercy. We make a mockery of our covenant of love with Him.
- Moreover, when you do receive Holy Communion, do it in a manner that shows you believe He is really and truly present in the Eucharist.
- Never receive Communion haphazardly or thoughtlessly; it’s a moment of prayer. Do not be casual or too familiar with the Eucharist and thereby treat the Host as something ordinary or commonplace. Be intentional, thoughtful, and recollected when you come forward.
- Truly, we must approach Communion as we would approach Jesus if He came back to earth and was standing here before us. We must treat the Eucharist not as simple bread, which it no longer is, but as Our Lord Himself!
- Yet, there’s still more we must do to be faithful to our covenant with God. In today’s first reading our Lord says: “if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people.”
- While spoken to Moses so long ago in the Sinai desert, these words are an invitation to us as well: an invitation to greater fidelity, of course, but also an invitation to be the special possessions of the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts.
- What’s more, these words are an invitation to imitate the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts. This means that we must burn with love for all mankind, being loving and merciful with others, even those who hurt us or whom we may consider enemies.
- Brothers and sisters, our readings today make it abundantly clear that God loves us and wants to show us His mercy. Yet, this burning love of God cannot be taken for granted. It’s a love so intense and fantastic that it requires a response of love in return.
- It requires that we always honor our baptismal covenant with our Lord by receiving Him in Holy Communion worthily and as reverently as possible, by being faithful to His teachings, and by doing our best to love Him above all else and our neighbors as ourselves – especially those neighbors we may find unlovable.
- May we form our hearts to possess all the virtues of the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts and thereby prepare ourselves well for the eternal joys of Heaven.
- Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us.
- Immaculate Heart of Mary, Cause of Our Joy, pray for us.