



Society of the Sacred Heart™
United States – Canada

June 19, 2020

Feast of the Sacred Heart Reflection

This year, as we know, the Feast of the Sacred Heart – the feast of unfathomable love – coincides with Juneteenth, the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the United States. These feasts of unfathomable love and of freedom for enslaved persons come together in an impelling synchronicity to awaken us. We are One Body. The Heart of Jesus impels us to act with hope and love for the freedom of all peoples, no matter what country we live in!

The reality of the feast of the Sacred Heart and the celebration of freedom for enslaved persons falling together further invites us to look more deeply and concretely at the questions we have lived since the founding of the Society in 1800, and refocused in the General Chapter of 2016: “Who is God calling us to be? What is God calling us to do?”

For the last couple of years, the province has been working to humbly claim our history of slave holding, to build relationships with the descendants of our enslaved persons and to work with them towards racial equity and an end to systemic racism in our institutional structures. The love of the heart of Jesus is the foundation for all these efforts. It is one of the ways we try to live the imperative in John’s letter today – “Let us love one another”

God is calling us to be a people who will cross the boundaries created by racism to build a new frontier where race and ethnicity are recognized as constructive realities; where the horror of our inhumanity to one another demands that we come together as One Body to preserve our common humanity.

God is calling us to recognize that although we are truly Sophie’s “little Society,” we are a loved and privileged people who have a public mission to discover and reveal God’s love by our actions, to create justice and build solidarity among all people.

God is calling us as educators, men and women of compassion and communion, to broaden our view of history and to acknowledge our complicity in allowing some of the legacy of racism to continue. God is inviting us to consider both our privilege and our rage as blocks to being and becoming our authentic selves, as blocks to being in relationship with one another and in being together at the table for justice sake.

Barbara Dawson, in her letter for the Sacred Heart Feast, calls us to renew our sense of Solidarity, which requires us to take steps that ensure, “a more just distribution of the world’s goods . . . demands an appreciation of other cultures and traditions; . . . means an end to any attitude of power and paternalism.” (General Chapter 1970)

Barb also suggests that this is a time to ENLARGE OUR VISION. The two-fold feast of God’s love and a people’s freedom is such a vision.

God is calling us to “acknowledge our complicity in systems that hurt, diminish, and disregard others and our earth” and to act humbly with others to advocate for change. (Artisans of Hope)

On this shared feast, we are invited to imagine what it is like to suddenly know you are free from a structure of bondage. Imagine how the heart would leap at such news! Surely the merciful covenant of the Heart of God and God’s strong hand brought the people out of the land of slavery. The Feast of the Sacred Heart and the Feast of freedom, Juneteenth, celebrate the faithful God who keeps promises to the thousandth generation. God calls us to be people who will be partners in bringing people out of bondage – our own and others – now, in this generation whose youth is so totally committed to justice by their physical presence, their tweets, their Instagram expressions.

As we renew our commitments today, let us do so with great gratitude that the Spirit is calling us forward. Let us also do so with deep faith and hope that our commitments to God are also our commitments to one another to make the world a better place for all.

Kim King RSCJ says it so well:

I renew my vow to stand within the fissure, within the wound; to stand in defiance of hate and to decry the sin of racism.

I renew my vow to love within the fissure, within the wound; to witness to love though I might shake and I might fall.

I renew my vow to speak, to preach, to write, to teach, to learn, to listen, to own my own feelings and my own humanity.

To hope as I stand and hope as I love. I renew my vow to seek you and to open to you, be found by you, formed by you; shaped in your image and likeness, conformed to your Sacred Heart.

Amen.

Sheila Hammond RSCJ
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