



“He Loved Us First”

Pastoral Letter from Bishop Phonsie Cullinan for the Month of the Sacred Heart

June 4th, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we enter the month of June, the month which is dedicated by the Church to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I write to you with great joy and pastoral concern. I meet people who are anxious and worried and am reminded to turn again to that source of eternal love which flows from the pierced Heart of Christ. In the Sacred Heart, we find the peace our hearts long for, the truth our minds seek, and the love that our world so desperately needs. The Lord who has a human heart, understands our personal human struggles in our relationships, families and every day lives. He is the King of broken hearts.

We give thanks for the witness of St Margaret Mary Alacoque, to whom the Lord revealed His Sacred Heart in Paray-le-Monial, and her spiritual director, St. Claude de la Colombière, whose theological insight and spiritual wisdom helped spread this devotion. The Sacred Heart called to them — as He calls to us — “Behold this Heart which has so loved people...”

In his 2024 Apostolic Letter *Dilexit Nos (He Loved us First)*, Pope Francis reminded us that the devotion to the Sacred Heart is not a sentimental piety but a call to enter into the very mystery of God’s love, who first loved us. “He loved us first,” the Pope says, “and He continues to love us with a pierced, burning Heart.”

This year marks the 350th anniversary of the first apparition of the Sacred Heart to St Margaret Mary. It is a moment of grace for the Universal Church.

A Legacy of Faith: Ireland and the Sacred Heart

It is a matter of both pride and gratitude that Ireland was the first nation in the world to be solemnly consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a historic act that took place in 1873. This was not merely a ceremonial gesture, but a profound recognition that Jesus Christ is Lord of our land, our homes, and our hearts.

On Passion Sunday, 30th March 1873, an event of decisive importance marked the religious history of Ireland: the bishops of Ireland solemnly consecrated the Irish nation to the Sacred



Heart. Other countries had already consecrated themselves diocese by diocese, but Ireland was the first to do so as a nation.

One of the key figures in promoting the Sacred Heart in Ireland was Father James Cullen S.J. (1841-1921). Best known for his role in the fight against Irish alcoholism, Fr Cullen founded the Pioneers' Association for Total Abstinence in (1898) which also aimed to spread devotion and make reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

For centuries, amid persecution, famine, and great suffering, our ancestors clung to the Heart of Jesus as their refuge. When churches were closed, the Mass forbidden, and Catholic families driven underground, the image of the Sacred Heart remained etched in their hearts and, when possible, on the walls of their homes. The Sacred Heart beat with them in times of sorrow and sustained their hope through unimaginable trials.

Today, different trials face our society — trials not of hunger and exile, but of confusion, individualism, and ideologies that erode the sanctity of family life and human dignity. The Sacred Heart remains our answer. He is not only a symbol of love, but of truth, of fidelity, and of divine mercy. Indeed devotion to Divine Mercy is a version of devotion to the Sacred Heart.



Refuge of the Immaculate

In 2025, in the parish of Clashmore, a new foundation will be born: the *Refuge of the Immaculate Heart*. This small residential home will serve as a place of hope and healing for women suffering from addiction under the care of wonderful religious Sisters. It will operate without state funding, relying entirely on Divine Providence and the generosity of the faithful.

I believe that this initiative was inspired by the Holy Spirit and the maternal tenderness of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.



The Sacred Heart Today

Devotion to the Sacred Heart is not a relic of the past. How often do we hear a reference to the 'heart' in songs and poetry. The Sacred Heart is a spiritual lifeline for our families, our youth, and our parishes today. In this most Sacred Heart, wounded and yet triumphant, we find the courage to resist the ideologies that diminish the importance of marriage, motherhood and fatherhood, the dignity of every person, and the sanctity of human life.

In June, the month of the Sacred Heart, I strongly encourage every family to:

- Pray daily to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, especially the Litany of the Sacred Heart.
- Place an image of the Sacred Heart in your home. Make your home a domestic church consecrated to Him.
- Trust in the promises He made to St Margaret Mary Alacoque — especially the promise that "I will bless every place in which an image of My Heart is exposed and honoured."
- Attend First Friday Masses, and if possible, spend time in Eucharistic Adoration.

Re-Consecration of Ireland to the Sacred Heart in June 2025

I warmly invite you all to a national re-consecration of Ireland to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to take place on Sunday, June 22nd, 2025, in Knock Shrine — our national Marian and Eucharistic shrine. Let us come together as a people, old and young, rural and urban, to once again proclaim Jesus as King of our hearts and of our nation.

My prayer is that we all return, as individuals, families, and parishes, to the Heart that has never stopped loving us. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved in every home in Ireland. Pope Leo has made reference to that line so full of meaning from St. Augustine: " Our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in You.

With every blessing,

Most Rev Alphonsus Cullinan DD
Bishop of Waterford and Lismore



Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Lord, have mercy *Lord, have mercy*
Christ, have mercy *Christ, have mercy*
Lord, have mercy *Lord, have mercy*

God the Father of Heaven
have mercy on us
God the Son, Redeemer of the world
have mercy on us
God the Holy Spirit
have mercy on us
Holy Trinity, one God
have mercy on us

Heart of Jesus, Son of the eternal Father *have mercy on us*
Heart of Jesus, formed by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mother
Heart of Jesus, one with the eternal Word
Heart of Jesus, infinite in majesty
Heart of Jesus, holy temple of God
Heart of Jesus, tabernacle of the Most High
Heart of Jesus, house of God and gate of heaven
Heart of Jesus, aflame with love for us
Heart of Jesus, source of justice and love
Heart of Jesus, full of goodness and love
Heart of Jesus, well-spring of all virtue
Heart of Jesus, patient and full of mercy
Heart of Jesus, generous to all who turn to you
Heart of Jesus, fountain of life and holiness
Heart of Jesus, source of healing
Heart of Jesus, sharer in our sorrow
Heart of Jesus, safe-guarder of the vulnerable
Heart of Jesus, friend of the betrayed

Heart of Jesus, companion of the ignored
Heart of Jesus, face of the misjudged
Heart of Jesus, memory of the disbelieved
Heart of Jesus, true voice in the silence
Heart of Jesus, wounded by our failings
Heart of Jesus, bearer of our sufferings
Heart of Jesus, acquainted with grief
Heart of Jesus, atonement for our sins
Heart of Jesus, overwhelmed with insults
Heart of Jesus, broken for our sins
Heart of Jesus, obedient even to death
Heart of Jesus, pierced by a lance
Heart of Jesus, source of all consolation
Heart of Jesus, our life and resurrection
Heart of Jesus, our peace and reconciliation
Heart of Jesus, victim for our sins
Heart of Jesus, salvation of all who trust in you
Heart of Jesus, hope of all who die in you
Heart of Jesus, delight of all the saints

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world *spare us, O Lord.*
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world *graciously hear us, O Lord.*
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world *have mercy on us*

Jesus, gentle and humble of heart.
Make our hearts like to Thine.

Let us pray.
Almighty and eternal God, look upon the Heart of Thy most beloved Son and upon the praises and satisfaction which He offers Thee in the name of sinners; and to those who implore Thy mercy, in Thy great goodness, grant forgiveness in the name of the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who livest and reignest with Thee forever and