

THE LOVE
OF GOD,
OUR
GREATEST
TREASURE

*Reflections
on the personal
love of God
for each of us*

BY SERVANT OF GOD
SISTER IDA PETERFY, SDSH



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GOD,
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SOCIETY DEVOTED TO THE SACRED HEART
2017



"My first call and first desire was that more and more people would know Our Lord on a deeply personal level."

It was early in Sister Ida's life that she realized:
"God not only loves me in general, God loves me personally! He knows me by my name! I am not just one out of a million, I am unique and special to Him."

Throughout her life this was the vision and conviction that she wanted to convey to others.

It is our hope that you will take time to read and pray with these simple yet profound insights from Servant of God Sister Ida Peterfy. As you do so, may God touch your heart as He did hers, to realize that God loves you personally and intimately. He is inviting you to a deeper friendship and relationship with Him.

Sisters of the
Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart

In presenting this booklet, we declare our sincere submission to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

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Who is God?

Where Can I Find Him?

If we know where we are going, we can put everything in its right place. Who is God? Where can we find Him? This is the basic question that modern man is asking, and it is man's greatest need. Some people want to reduce God to a measurable size, and in that way, possess Him. If we would be able to explain God completely, it would mean that He is only as big as we are.

In a magnet there are two separate poles. The magnet is going to draw objects to itself. What kind of objects? Objects which are similar in substance to the magnet, objects which have the "like substance" as the magnet itself. Although we do not see it happening with our eyes, the magnetic power can actually transform the make-up of a piece of iron. The positively charged atoms will be at the top, the negatively charged atoms will collect at the bottom. With our eyes, we cannot see the difference; the magnetic power cannot be seen either.

What if that little piece of iron could talk, what would it say? "I began my journey toward the magnet and I was moving toward it beautifully, steadily until I got there and was united to the

magnet." That would be true. But suppose the little piece of iron would have free will, and say "I started my journey to the magnet but then I decided to try something different so I dipped myself in plastic, or I covered myself with porcelain." What would happen? The piece of iron would never make it to the magnet. Why not? Because it had decided to put on something which was unlike, which was not of the same substance as the magnet. But as soon as it will get rid of that coat it put on, it will again be pulled beautifully to the magnet.

In His relationship to us, God cannot *not* love us. Julian of Norwich said, "For God, it is impossible not to love us because our substance is like His lively substance." God loves us not because of any secondary reason, like what "coat" we are wearing, He loves us because of who we are. What God loves in us is not our good or bad deeds, He loves us because He has so much of himself in us! And because of who we are, we can do things which are God-like. Because we have His love in us, we are transformed.

Think of a great artist. Which is first, the artist or his work? Which is first, the artist's work or his love for his work? A great artist loves his work and does not stop, cannot turn away from his work; he puts his best into it, and nothing less than his best. He loves his work. When God does something, He does

it very well. When He breathes His life, His love into us, we are made in His likeness. This is such a terrific work that, even if we do not acknowledge it, or even deny it, He cannot deny Himself! He did His very best! We are created in the likeness of God. (*Genesis 1:27*)

God did not have to make us. The great artist did not have to make that artwork, but he loves that artwork which was made with all his sweat and suffering. What happens in magnetism? That piece of iron becomes magnetic, and then it can pull others and unite others to the magnet. But if it is separated from the magnet, it will fall off and it cannot bring others into that unity.

The Roman martyrs gave up everything rather than to deny Christ. It is amazing how they lived their baptismal consecration to the fullest! To the world, it did not make much sense, it seemed foolish to go to that extreme. But when we stand at a dying person's bedside, it does not look foolish at all. We can ask ourselves, "What do we live for?" If we know God's love, then we know there are treasures other than money or things, we know there is a plan for us that reaches into eternity.

It is not what you do that counts but the spirit that you do it with that matters. This is where God's goodness comes in. The love of God is our

greatest treasure. If you go through different kinds of persecution, you value the things of this earth differently. During the war, people lost everything: homes, family, property. We saw that if you put your trust in things, they can be gone in an instant.

Thinking can be so tiresome; some people try to avoid it. They would rather move through life as on an assembly-line or just “be like everybody else.” Where do we come from? Where are we going? God gave us the gift of knowledge and prudence. We can know what is good and what is not good. We have to be able to see God working in our life.

We have the freedom to do what we want, but God will never stop loving us. Ask God to help you to acknowledge and accept His great love for you; ask Him to enlighten your mind and heart to look at yourself, and others, in the light of His Spirit and to remember, whatever I have, whatever I am doing, it is to bring me in contact with God.

God Knows Me

St. John, as an old man, writes his Gospel and he looks back at his life. The idea that stands out for him as he is remembering Our Lord and His earthly life and the life of the young Church is **love**. In St. John's letter, it is not shocking for us to hear that "God is Love" (*1 John 4:8*); we have come to take it for granted. But for the early Christians, who were mostly Jewish converts, or pagans who were afraid of their gods, for them to look at God as love, was shocking. They were used to looking at God and thinking only of His mighty deeds, His "strong arm," the "fortress," the "rock." It was a shock to hear that God is Love.

St. John immediately says that God's love was manifested by sending us His love; he does not even say "Savior," he just says "Son." (*1 John 4:9*) For St. John in the beginning of his Gospel, the Son is connected with the "Word" (*John 1:1*) – God expressing Himself. God says "Listen to my Son, my only Son; how much I love Him." For St. John, the Son is the image, the splendor of God the Father.

Have we overcome Calvinism, that fundamentalism in us? Do we accept that the Son of God became man? Some of us may feel that we have had an overdose of dogma taught to us, but what we are

really seeking to know is: Who is God? Where can we find Him? This is a deep desire in every human soul.

This Son is with us today in a very special way. As He once came as a child, He comes now in the humble species of bread. He is with us in His Body, the Church. How much He desires to bring people to Himself, and let them know how supremely attractive, how supremely lovable He is! This is giving them “loaves instead of stones” (*Matthew 7:9*)! He was sent that we would see that God is Love. It is alright to shake our heads and say, “Lord, this is hard to believe! Help my unbelief.” (*Mark 9:24*) This is a deeply Christian prayer. We wonder, “How can you love me, God, when you know me so thoroughly and see me in the depths of my being?”

God knows more about each one of us than we will ever know about ourselves. Yet He loves each of us so very deeply. He keeps our good deeds “like a ring on His finger” in front of Him (*Sirach 17:17*). By the end of the day, I may forget the good I have done, but He does not forget. He knows exactly how much we are suffering, “He keeps our tears in a little bottle.” (*Psalms 56:9*) God, how can you love us so much? He answers, and His answer is very simple, “I know you, you ravish my heart.” (*Song of Songs 4:9*)

He knows what He got! And He loves us totally, even the part of us that we do not want to know or see. The fact of our woundedness brings God closer. Jesus often said, "I did not come to heal the healthy, I came to heal the sick." (*Mark 2:17*) When the sick came to Jesus, He asked them, "What do you want me to do?" One said, "Lord, I want to see!" (*Mark 10:51*) Jesus' response, "Of course I want you to see." Another said, "That I might be cleansed!" Jesus' answer, "Of course I want to make you whole." (*Luke 5:12-13*)

Our woundedness brings God closer. All of us would want to help a wounded child; his suffering brings us closer to him. St. Ignatius said, "The Lord embraces us when we pray, when we contemplate." Yet we are so dubious about His great love. Many writers say that God "inflames" the hearts of those who pray. It is too much for us to think that, so we try to make it a little more acceptable by using less dramatic words.

Jesus, who knows the Father, tells the story of the prodigal son (*Luke 15:11-32*). But rather than it being a story about the son, it is the story of the good father. What happened there? Jesus is not using words lightly. He really means them. He could have used other words, but He says, "The father embraced the son and kissed him tenderly." (*Luke 15:20*)

God embraces me when I am coming to Him, when I am in His presence. The root of this expression “to embrace” is a very deep, a very strong love. It is putting your arms out and bringing the other into your life. We know that we cannot actually do this by that outward sign and gesture, but this is what we desire, and this is what God can do, if we allow Him.

Do I really believe this? Do I really want this closeness, this intimacy with God?

Why should God go this far? Perhaps we would feel more comfortable if He would be just a little less than He really is. Faith keeps this intimacy within bounds; it is too awesome to express in words, only through faith can we approach it.

When we face the mystery of God, our reaction is an overwhelming awe bordering on fear. Why? Because it induces a sense of insecurity; we cannot handle God’s thoughts, His plans; we cannot master God! And our natural tendency is to want to reduce God, to reduce His plan to our plan, His way to our way. Or we try to create a distance. This is so human.

We have to remember Our Lord’s love, but also His humanity, and His tremendous act of taking our sins upon Himself. He who did not know

sin, became sin for our sake. (*2 Corinthians 5:21*) The Son of God began to be afraid in the garden when the chalice was presented to Him by the Father. And He prayed, "Father, take it away!" (*Luke 22:42*) We see this fear in the Apostles, also. And God keeps reassuring us, "Do not be afraid." In the Old Testament, starting with the very beginning, God says so often, "Do not be afraid." (*Isaiah 41:10*) "I am who am. I am with you." (*Exodus 3:14*) How many times Jesus said this to His Apostles! "It is I, do not be afraid." (*Matthew 14:27*) It meant so much to them! It meant "God-with-us." (*Matthew 1:23*) This is coming from God! He is so close, so humble, constantly assuring us, "Do not be afraid. I am with you and I am love."

Why is this so hard for us to believe? Why was it so hard for the Apostles? Because they perceived God, Yahweh, as a force. They did not perceive God as God who cares, personally cares, and personally knows us. They did not perceive Him as God who says "I hold you in the palm of my hand." (*Isaiah 41:13*)

We have to believe that God the Father loves us so much that He reassures us not to be afraid. We have to believe that Jesus loves us so much that we would not be afraid to approach Him. We have to believe that the Spirit of God is Love and love takes away all fear. (*1 John 4:18*) This love has been given to us

in our Baptism, in our Confirmation. The Spirit of Jesus and the Spirit of the Father is in us! We need to bring this God to the people! He is so anxious to reassure us that His Name is not “force,” not “majesty,” but “love”!

In Scripture, Numbers 18:20, we hear “God is my portion.” The Levites were people who were set apart. Everyone else got a piece of land, but they did not because God was “their heritage,” their “portion.” God called us first. And our answer? “You are my portion, Lord. I have chosen You, my God and my All.” (cf. *Psalm 73:26, Lamentations 3:24*)

St. Paul says it so beautifully, so awesomely, that God is our portion. He says: “What can separate us from the love of Christ?” (*Romans 8:35-39*) Is there any power, any force, any misery, any disadvantage which can separate us from the love of Christ? He is my all, my heritage, my portion. Nothing can separate me from Him!”

St. John says, “If you love Him, then you love all His children.” We cannot separate God from His children. You cannot love God without loving His children, everyone. It is the Father’s life to love without measure, to lay down his life for his children! Look! See Jesus-see God! If you see Jesus, you see the Father giving His total self to us! (*1 John 3*)

Our Relationship to God

Think of the earth and how it is held together by the forces of its own center; yet it is kept on its course not only by its own force but by the sun which is above it and outside of it. And from the sun, the earth receives warmth, and light, and fertility.

Then think of how the rays of the sun are kept away from the earth by certain things produced by the earth: vapors, clouds, etc. The sun is always there, yet some days are cloudy, some days are cold and dark. The earth produces the obstacles that are in the way of the sun.

Compare how God's love is always there, that God is unchangeable, and how He always attracts us, and yet we do not see Him. Often, according to our mood and because we do not feel anything special, we may project out, as if it would be God who one day loves us and the other day does not. We need to ask for the grace that our eyes would be opened to see the realities of God and, with that new vision, we would love Him more and serve Him better.

Think of how man is held together by a central force – the soul. Our soul is what makes us smile when we are happy or grieve when we are sad, and be active and searching for things. Yet the soul is

not the only thing that keeps us in existence. God is the outside force, like the sun for the earth, yet a million times more. It is He who keeps us on our course and whom we need very, very badly in order to be happy. Just as the earth needs the light and the heat of the sun, the human soul needs the grace of God, needs the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity.

Our relationship to God is very different than the relationship of the sun and the earth. They cannot change their course; the earth *must* go around the sun. But the human soul is different; we can decide for ourselves. Even though God is the main attraction of the soul and He is the One who can really make us happy, we can still turn away from Him and turn toward our own central attraction and fool ourselves to say that we are happy. We can look upon our own perfection, what we consider our own greatness. What could we consider as our own central attraction? Somebody might think of his or her talents, or own importance, or comfort, or opinion and say "This, nobody can take away from me. What is in my head is my own!" We can be so proud that despite our failures, we may feel that we are doing well.

If we turn inward to our own selves, closing ourselves away from the life of our soul, nothing worthwhile will come from it. We will be leading

ourselves in the wrong direction. Here we come to a very interesting thought – the great importance of human free will, *my* free will, what *I* prefer or want to do. Do I prefer my own greatness, my own perfection? This is a great trap which the devil tries to put before us: our own perfection. Then the ideal would be *myself!*

In a certain sense, we should forget about our own perfection. We should prefer God to anything else, not with a false piety of “I love God and I don’t care what others think.” Instead of clinging to our self-made image of what makes us holy, it would be more beneficial to realize that God uses others to express His will to us. Look to see how God manifests His will to us through our spouse, our children, maybe even our boss or co-workers.

The proverb or good saying of St. Teresa of Avila is “Humility is truth.” It is not humility to deny the gifts each one of us has received from God. Humility is truth. We have to learn to say things the way they are. We can do this if we learn to see God for who He is and see ourselves as who we are. That will put us on the right course!

The more we know about God and His greatness, His perfections, the more truthful our image will be about ourselves and the more honestly we will be able to judge the things we do. We will be more

realistic and sincere in looking at our faults and failures. I will know who I am, not compared to the next door neighbor, but compared to God! It will be truth.

We are influenced by many things. We are influenced by our senses; we are drawn by our senses to do or not to do things. We are influenced by others. We are also influenced by our moods and by attractions. Then we may not see clearly who we are or where we stand because those things color the reality. If we feel moody, blue, and do not feel like doing things, we may feel “everybody is picking on me,” and we get touchy or hurt and start arguing or wanting to hurt back. In all that, you manifest yourself as a proud person because all those things have blurred your vision. Then, for a while, you do not realize who you are and who God is.

At times, we may go to the other extreme: we are in a good mood, everything is dandy, others think we are a lot of fun, others appreciate us, accept what we say, etc. That too is a false view because we are too involved in what others think of us, in making a good impression, etc.

So what is humility? No matter what abilities or talents we have or do not have, God is great enough to make a good instrument of us if we cooperate.

Remember what Our Lord told the Pharisees who were so proud, so full of themselves: “Don’t you know that God can raise sons of Abraham out of these very stones.” (*Luke 3:8*) We do not have to have fantastic talents in order to serve God. If God sends you to accomplish certain tasks or duties, He is great enough to give you the means and the strength to do it. You may not feel like doing it but He can help you if you really want Him to. On the other hand, just because someone is very talented, that does not mean he or she would be outstanding in doing God’s will. It is not enough just to act according to what we think. True humility is to know that, of myself, I am nothing and can do very little; but with God, I can do anything! That is the prayer of St. Francis: “Lord, make me an instrument of your Love.”

Even though we are able to and could choose our own central attraction or just be fascinated with ourselves, God is a very warm-hearted and jealous lover. He loves us much more than to let us go astray. If we are foolish enough to deceive ourselves, He will shake us up once in a while to show us who we really are. He may give us an experience of our own littleness. Maybe we want to do something really well, and it turns out just the opposite. At those times we could readily accept being scolded or reprimanded because we, too, would like to kick ourselves. We see that we are not as great as we

thought we were. It may sometimes seem that the more we want to serve God, the more we see our faults and the more we manifest our poor qualities in front of others.

We can have different reactions when we see our littleness. We can say, "Oh well, that's just how I am." Or we can say, "Everybody is against me, nobody understands me, I really wanted to do it right!" Or we might see that this is God's way of showing us how little we are and how much we need to depend on Him.

We do not want to try to run on our own fuel-power. Humbly tell Our Lord, "Thank you, God, for showing me to me as I really am. I beg for your help because I need your help so badly." That is what humility is: to accept, to ask, to depend on God and on His help.

Let us live by Faith and look for the will of God. Let us be attentive to find out what God wants, not what *I* feel like doing but what *He* wants. Then we can be sure everything will turn out right. The "right" way does not always mean it has to be according to *my* plans or be *my* success. God can carry out *His* plans even through our failures.

God is willing to give us everything! But it is still necessary that we offer our heart and unite our will

to His. It is a matter of telling Him, and proving it, by using all the opportunities He sends. We have to do all that is in our power, all that depends on us, then we can expect and depend on it that God will give His help, His grace.

Go before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Thank Him very wholeheartedly for His all-giving love. Ask Him sincerely to open your eyes to see the great reality that is Himself, and the reality of yourself. Ask Jesus to make your heart meek and humble according to His own Heart.

Christ Living Amongst Us

The Church is nothing else but Christ continuing in this world; it is Christ living amongst us through His members. Just as you can see God through creation in this world, you should see Him through the Church in this world.

First, think of the world. See how rich creation is, how many kinds of things there are, how much there is, the quantity. Somehow this is another way of God showing us how He is – infinite, immense in goodness, in beauty, in power. Think of the mountains, one mountain range after another; when you think “This is the end” there is another. There is so much.

If you think of Our Lord living amongst us again, you can “see” His face in so many ways. Where you can see Him most is in those who follow His counsel and consecrate themselves to God the Father as He did. If you would take that out of life then, somehow, Christ would be shown in such an imperfect manner. Through us God can be seen living amongst us more clearly and forcefully than any other way. It is not our wisdom, it is His wisdom which leads us and guides us and helps us.

Secondly, think of Christ's priestly function. He is the mediator between God and man. And the deepest reason for this work which He took upon Himself is His love, His tremendously great love.

You can look at the Church, or the Sacraments, or any teachings of Our Lord and you will see that there is never a distinction between people for Him. He did not choose only one group of people and leave out the rest. How universally He loves everyone! How could Infinite Love show itself in any other way than by loving infinitely without reserve, without distinction, without holding back!

So then how can we pick and choose and deal only with those who are very good people, very educated people, or only those who seem to want to achieve a higher spiritual life? Christ is living amongst us, continuing His life through us, through us going out to all people.

Christ called Himself "the Good Shepherd." (*John 10:11*) This is not an adjective we put on Him. He Himself compared Himself to a good shepherd who gives his life for his sheep. We have a tremendous responsibility – that people would really see Christ through us.

Think about your personal contacts with Our Lord – in meditation, in prayer, and most of all in the

Mass, the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance/ Reconciliation. Those are the times when He is helping us very actively, positively, helping us to be more like He is. But only if we let Him.

And don't forget, He is not impatient; He is tactful, and He is holy in every respect. He is not going to use tricks on us. So, the more open we are towards Him and the more we rely on Him and tell Him what our needs are, the more He can help us.

Ask His help, and tell Him that you are ready to accept His help. Tell Him, not because He cannot read your heart and soul. He can. But ask Him, tell Him because you need to. Otherwise you will not see the occasions when He is offering you the help that you need.

Think of these virtues:

Zeal: "To do the will of Him who sent me" (*John 4:34*)

Charity: "Men will know that you are my disciples by the love you bear one another" (*John 13:35*)

Humility: "Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart" (*Matthew 11:29*)

Obedience: "Without me you can do nothing...If you ask the Father anything in my name, He will grant it" (*John 15:5,7*)

Why do we want to excel in these virtues? Why not others? Try to figure this out. The words from Holy Scripture, our Lord's words, will give you the clue.

Lastly, talk to our Blessed Mother. She was the mold for Christ. Christ became visible for us through the Blessed Virgin Mary; He took on a human nature and a human body through her. So also, Christ will be visible to the world through us and through who we are. We need our Blessed Mother to help us. She is the mother of Christ and she is our mother. As with Christ, she can mold us.

Perhaps we will not get very far in some things because we did not ask Mary to help us to be born in this world in that resemblance to Christ. The power does not come from her, but through her. She is the distributor of graces. She can get that grace, that power, for us which we are unable to get on our own; or she can get back for us that power which we had but which we lost because we did not cooperate with it. If we ask for it through our Mother, she will help us to keep it, cooperate with it, and achieve the aim.

Also, ask for the protection of St. Joseph, the patron of the universal Church. We know that he is the "terror of the demons." Ask him to keep Satan away from you, and to keep you away from all his works and temptations. Cardinal Suenens said,

“How different the world would be if souls consecrated to God would radiate Christ to the world.”

I give extra-special thanks to Our Lord in His Sacred Heart that He called our Society and helped our Society through so many really serious problems. He personally cared for and helped us. I am sure that we would not be at all if it were not because of His love and special care. We could have been lost a thousand times! “Without Me you can do nothing. But with Me, you can do everything.” (*John 15:5*)

So, ask God the Father, in the Name of Jesus Christ, to bless you and to bless you in these times when the Church needs you so very much. We can be a kind of “guiding light” showing which way to go; by our lives we can show people what is important and what is not so important.

When you receive Our Lord in Holy Communion, make it a time of thanksgiving: thank Our Lord, thank our Blessed Mother, thank the Sacred Heart for His miracles in this life which seem to be so simple, so easy, almost “natural” and without effort. I consider the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart, and that we exist the way we do, as one of His miracles.

For His great goodness and kindness and

miraculous help, we need to give thanks. Nothing is as horrible to God as an ungrateful heart. So, look at everything, and look at yourself from this point of view. Realize that all is His gift! Be deeply grateful. Give Him thanks.

"Athletes" for Christ

Preparations are a help for success. As we prepare for Lent, it is not too early to plan and not just wait until the last minute to decide what to do. Lent is often referred to as the time of asceticism. The word comes from the word "ascein" which means "to exercise." "Ascesis" means exercise which is vigorous training. An "ascetic" is one who devotes himself to this kind of life, one who exercises vigorously. When asceticism is rational, there is a harmony of mind and body and it prepares the person for the service of an ideal.

Could you be a great ascetic? Before deciding for or against it, it is important to know some facts. Asceticism is not an outward formality; you cannot recognize an ascetic just by looking at him. You can see a man with hollow, deep-set eyes, a thin face, bones that seem to be sticking out. Is he an ascetic, or is he just sick?

The outward appearance does not tell us whether a person is an ascetic or not. St. Thomas Aquinas was quite fat, and St. Teresa of Avila was a big strong woman. St. Francis de Sales said, "A saint who would be sad would be a sad saint." Asceticism is not something negative. Abnegation, giving-up things, is just the means used by those who exercise;

it is not the end for which they exercise. We have to have a reason, a very positive reason, to take up exercise. Asceticism is something very positive, full of order and willingness, for a great reason.

St. Paul is a great help to clear notions. St. Paul was teaching the Greeks at Corinth. At that time the word "ascein" was a very common word. They had another word for someone who exercised vigorously; that word was "athlete." This is the word St. Paul uses. Where does the word "athlete" come from? It comes from "athlon," which means "the prize." The athlete is the one who wins the prize, but not without vigorous exercise; the two notions go together.

So when St. Paul wanted to talk about Christian life to the Greeks, what did he do? He pointed to a man who wanted to win the prize. The Greeks were famous for going after big prizes. Everyone was willing to train to be able to win. This is what St. Paul compares our Christian life with in the First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 9:24-27:

"Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises, disciplines in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. Thus I do not run aimlessly; I do not fight as if

I were shadowboxing. No, I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.”

This made sense to the Corinthians. All of a sudden, they understood – if you want to win, you have to exercise vigorously; you have to give up certain things, not for nothing, for no reason, but to win! We can call Christian life and the ascetic, the “athlete of Christ” and the “sport” is spiritual life.

The comparison is very good, especially in this modern life. It brings out so well that we are not subjecting our body to make it weak and unusable; rather, we want to make it flexible and strong, a good instrument to achieve the aim. What is the aim? Is it to win a corruptible crown or an incorruptible one? It is very important to know why we want to be an athlete for Christ: we want to clear away the obstacles that might come between ourselves and our willingness to move for Christ. Why? So, that we could love Him as we are called, as we are commanded, to love Him “with all our mind, with all our heart and with all our will.” (*Deuteronomy 6:5*) We do it so that there would not be any interference in achieving this goal.

We can dream about doing a handstand, but unless we try to overcome the resistance of our muscles, we will never be able to do a handstand. We can

dream about being united to Christ, but unless we overcome some pleasures, we will not be able to get to that union. Without that training, that exercise, there is no union of love between God and the human soul. We have to make the house clean, not just empty it, we have to “pretty it up” so that Christ may enter in, and all heaven with Him! Union with God cannot be done without asceticism. We have to know the prize – union with Christ! I living in Him, He living in me without any obstacles! This is something very positive.

The exercises which lead to this discipline of clearing away obstacles from the path of Christ must be positive. In the past, mortifications of the body were highlighted. Today, our asceticism must be much more simple. We must not break away from the world as the hermits did. We must not break down our bodies with extreme fasting and lack of sleep. Rather, we should become integral parts of the world of God. We should develop our abilities, our energies, so that we might be set apart for recollection of higher thoughts, higher sentiments.

Think of a businessman, or of a teacher, or a student, and think of yourself. The aim of our exercises is to win union with Christ. The end or the aim is not to break down our bodies, it is rather to make our body more organized so that we would be able to have higher thoughts, higher aims, higher sentiments;

so that we would be able to be recollected during the day. All of this would be possible for a businessman, a teacher, a student, and of course, for you. There must be a harmony between the world of nature and the world of God which is the world of divine love. We have to reach out for everything that helps us to love God more.

If we read the writings of some of the hermits, there is great emphasis on practices to weaken the body. Why? In those times, people went quite far in seeking pleasure. The hermits emphasized weakening the body so that it would not commit sin. The modern trend now is to control the body, to fortify it so that it would be able to do the good and to do it habitually, steadily. Look at the difference: weaken the body so that it would not sin, or, strengthen the body, control the body, so that it would do good.

In the exercises, the practices we choose for Lent, we should have as a guideline that, while we reject all senseless and poisoning thoughts, we actually try to be filled with as many good thoughts of God, of man, of the world, as possible. When you are fighting against jealousy, you have to throw out any poisoning thoughts while at the same time filling your mind with something positive. You might think of the suffering the person has to go through – the one of whom you may be so jealous. It is easy for us to judge and think “She is so fat,”

when we could rather think: "It must be hard for her to control her appetite all the time." We can think many negative thoughts about a person, about others, the world, etc. That could be considered a kind of asceticism, but that would be running and "exercising" in a negative way.

We are called by God, not to see the bad and run away, but rather to look for and see the good, to try to see divine providence even if there are people who are spending their time just looking for others' weaknesses. We should not be satisfied with giving in helplessly, sadly. We have to look for and see God's will in everything, good and bad alike, pleasant and unpleasant alike. And if we do this in our own lives we will be able to do it for others and open their eyes to the many good things they have, maybe even to see the spiritual advantages they have.

Try to do more than just to avoid projecting negative thoughts about others. Be eager to do a great deal of good, especially for those around you. We have to avoid sin. But while we are avoiding sin, we should not be spiritual hypochondriacs. Practice the good steadily, even if you do not see much progress outwardly. Instead of running from the world, we can build a bridge between the natural and the supernatural life, between God and ourselves.

“Where our treasure is, there is our heart”
(*Matthew 6:21*) and our treasure is His Heart!

This is why we can renounce what other people are striving for. Why? Because we know there is something greater than things. Although we are using those things, we strive to be detached from them. We know how to use them because we believe in the loving providence of God. Through our life, we are seeking to please God and do whatever He desires (e.g. controlling our imagination, etc.) It is all for that purpose – to please God. See how positive this is!

It is a tremendously great thing to follow Christ Our Lord who became obedient unto death. We participate in His work of love to redeem mankind. Each act of obedience, each time I deny myself and what I want (and I do so for the good of another) I am taking an active part in the redeeming sacrifice of Christ. It does not matter if I feel an attraction, or get a response; the excellence is not in the material value, it is in the degree of charity, of love, which I have for Our Lord and the conviction that He has the power to give me the strength I need.

God sees the heart, He sees the reason why I am doing what I am doing. Whatever I do, little or big, it gets its dignity from the reason for which I am doing it.

In whatever you choose to practice during Lent, be sure that your reason is right and you do it in union with Our Lord. That is what God is pleased with.

What does His love urge you to do?

Power to Forgive Sin

There are many things which we take for granted. The more we use things the more we take them for granted. What are those things? Air, water. You have to have a war to know that air is precious (It can be poisoned!) and water is precious (It can be cut off!) We take people for granted too, very often those closest to us. We apologize to strangers, yet it is so easy to hurt a friend, or our mother or father. It is when, all of a sudden, death hits, that we realize what we missed. What a terrible feeling it is not to be able to talk to that person again in this life. You wish you had been nicer, better, more kind.

How did the Apostles, the friends of Jesus, feel after Jesus died? It had been so sudden! Three days, and He was dead and buried and a big stone was rolled in front of the tomb and it was sealed. How did Peter feel about the near past? What did He remember? That he had denied Christ that night in the garden. He must have regretted that he did not stay up and pray with Jesus, instead, he was selfishly thinking of his own comfort. He had watched others – Judas. He had not done anything to stop him. So many things must have bothered Peter.

And how did James and John feel? They were the ones who were so anxious to get ahead in the

group. When Jesus was talking about His death – that He would be captured and crucified, right then is when they asked their mother to talk to Jesus about who would sit at His side, at His right-hand. (*Matthew 20:20-23*) How sad they must have felt, how much they must have wished they had listened to what Jesus was telling them about His suffering and what would happen afterwards.

And what about Thomas? He was the one who completely lost his faith! He had so little confidence in Christ. (*John 20:24-29*) And how did the rest of them feel? They were sad and they were ashamed for having been so afraid of the enemies of Christ. They had not even dared to take His body off of the cross. His body was buried by Joseph and Nicodemus, men who were not as close to Jesus as they had been. (*John 19:38-42*)

This is how they felt. So, when the women came to tell them that they had seen Jesus and that He was alive, we are not surprised to hear that they could hardly believe them. They were not filled with joy; they still felt very troubled.

It did not take long before Jesus appeared to them, even through closed doors. There He was, standing in front of them! “Peace be with you,” He said. Then He showed them the marks of the wounds in His hands and feet and side. He assured them, “Do not

be afraid, it is I." They could touch His hands, He was not a spirit but the same Christ they knew and loved! And He ate with them so that they would not be afraid of Him. (*Luke 24:36-49*)

Did Jesus scold them? Did He complain about their weaknesses? No, not a bit. He came to share with His friends, and with all of us, the fruits of His suffering. And He gave His apostles a gift greater than any miracle He had performed.

What were some of the miracles of Jesus? He gave sight to the blind, He made the lame walk; they could throw away their crutches and walk! He made the deaf hear; He gave life back to those who were dead! These were great miracles! But now, He was going to give a power to His Apostles, the first priests, to perform a miracle much greater than any of these! Those miracles gave back health to the body; this miracle would do something greater than that.

Jesus breathed on the Apostles, He showed, even in action, the power He was going to give to them. He said, "As the Father sent me, I send you. Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven. And whose sins you retain, their sins will not be forgiven." (*John 20:21-23*)

What is the miracle? If we would be able to see the

soul of a person in sin, it would be in a much worse state than someone who had been lying in a tomb for four days like Lazarus. (*John 11:1-44*) That soul without God's sanctifying grace would be in much worse shape than that dead body! It would look worse than the body of a leper!

Through the power that Christ gave to the Apostles to forgive sins, what happens in that person's soul? The one who comes seeking Christ's forgiveness is forgiven in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! And the merits of Christ are applied to him. All of a sudden, he is alive again, he receives sanctifying grace, he shares in divine life again! If you would be able to see with your eyes what you will see in heaven, you would see a greater miracle, more basic and more real than the healing of the body!

This is the power given to all of Christ's priests. And we are able to receive the merits of Christ's sufferings and share in those eternal treasures which He got for us on the cross: we can receive forgiveness for our sins, small or big, we can receive divine grace back!

If we commit a serious sin, a mortal sin, can we ever go directly to Christ again? Just remember how ready Jesus was to receive sinners. He never refused to talk to anyone who came to Him

personally and directly, no matter how great a sinner he or she was. Remember the woman who was known to be a great sinner? People despised Mary Magdalen; they considered her a terrible no-good person. When she came to Jesus at a dinner party, all the Pharisees looked at her and thought, "How can Jesus talk to her! Doesn't He know she is bad and no good!" But Jesus did not care what they thought. He let this poor woman wash His feet with her tears and express how sorry she was. Jesus forgave her sins. (*Luke 7:36-50*) And remember the thief and murderer whom Jesus forgave? He was the one who was crucified with Jesus. He turned to Jesus and told Him how sorry he was. Jesus told him, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." (*Luke 23:43*)

Can we go to Jesus personally today? Of course we can! We can run to Him as soon as we realize that we turned away from Him, that we committed sin. We can go straight to Jesus and tell Him how sorry we are. If you are sorry for your sins because you love Jesus, then no matter how big or serious your sins are, they are forgiven immediately. Even if you committed a terrible mortal sin, but you recognize it and are truly sorry and tell that to Jesus and promise not to do it again, your sin is forgiven! Is that all we have to do? No, we still need to make a formal apology. Who needs that formal apology? We do! This is why we still have

to go to confession and make that formal apology to God.

Why is that formal apology needed? If a child is misbehaving at home or in school, we can see that he is sorry, but it is good for him to make a formal apology. If he does not express that remorse, we cannot help him. It is good for us to go to confession and make that formal apology to God, not because God needs it, but because we need it.

Another reason why Christ gave us the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation and provided sacramental absolution for us is because He knows that it is good for us to go to God directly. We tell our sins, and we can be sure that we are forgiven. Through His priest, we hear Christ's forgiveness. Later on, we will not need to wonder "Did I really tell God? Did He really forgive me?" When we are confessing our sins to the priest, if something is not clear, the priest can ask us about it.

There is another reason for confessing to the priest: if we commit a mortal sin, only perfect contrition can take it away. If we confessed it only to God privately, later on we might wonder whether we were sorry, not because of our love for God, but maybe because we were afraid of hell. We could be in endless doubt and torture of soul wondering whether we had perfect contrition or not.

In the Sacrament of Penance, even if we do not have perfect contrition, we still receive absolution from our sins, even mortal sins. We can know for sure that our sins were forgiven by God. See what a wonderful gift of God this is! Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted this Sacrament of Penance for us. The Sacrament of Penance gives a special peace of mind and soul because we receive absolution from someone who is authorized by Christ himself to forgive and tell us: "I forgive you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

We knew a priest who was imprisoned by the Communists in China. He was in a modern prison, a circular building with several stories. The cells were built in a way that the guards could watch the cells from a central point. The prisoners were allowed to go out and walk in the corridor in front of their cells. The priest was denied that privilege. He was there in his cell watching the prisoners walking in this circle and passing his cell. Then he saw a man who was so anxious to attract his attention. The man made a cross with his two thumbs. The priest wondered, "Does it mean he is a Christian?" He made the same sign back to the man. The man saw it; he looked so relieved that the priest understood what he meant. When he came around again, that time the man struck his breast. The priest wondered, "Does it mean he is sorry?" He indicated to the man, "Yes, I understand you are sorry for your sins." The

third time the man came around, the priest gave him absolution. The man was fully forgiven for his sins! This priest told us that he would never forget the look of relief and happiness and gratefulness in the eyes of that prisoner. Later on, this priest was exiled from China.

Why is it that if confession is so good and gives us so much, we are still afraid of it? Some people seem to think of confession as going into a torture chamber. Why is that? Because things often become what we make of them. When you were young, perhaps it was not explained well to you exactly what happens and what you have to do to make a good confession and use the Sacrament well. If we do not use the Sacrament well, it really does not bring forth the good fruits that Our Lord wants for us.

Thinking of our sins is just a small part of confession. Do not be afraid that you will not know or remember all your sins. If you love God and you learned His Commandments, then any big sins will pop up in your mind; maybe they were already bothering you before. If you missed Mass on Sunday, you will remember. And you know very well that it is bad to voluntarily look at indecent pictures, or see movies or do acts just to get pleasure that is not moral. You will remember those sins because you know they are contrary to God's commandments. You can ask the Holy Spirit to help you to remember.

To think about our sins is just part of the confession. What is the greater, more important part of confession, what matters most? That you are truly sorry for your sins. Does that mean you will be crying big, fat tears? No, that is not the kind of sorrow we are talking about. A child who broke mother's special cup can be shedding big tears and saying "I'm sorry" and at the same time be reaching out for another cup! Tears do not matter, what really matters is to turn well away from that bad action. You simply say "This is what I did. This is what I do not want to continue doing."

Real sorrow is called "contrition." It is a sorrow that comes from your love for God. It helps you come to the conclusion that you want to do something about this in the future. You ask yourself "What am I going to do to avoid this occasion of sin in the future?" It would be such a negative activity to keep pulling up the weeds in the garden but never planting anything to make the garden beautiful. Why do we clean the junk out of our house? So, we can make room for something nice, something good. If we are getting rid of our sins, we have to think about what we are going to do next, how we are going to avoid sin and build virtues and do good in the future. We have to do our part! This is included in real contrition: we turn away from the bad and turn towards the good; that is not just running away from sin, it is running to God.

Then comes the actual part when we are going to tell our sins to the priest. Here again so many people make the mistake of thinking that it would be much easier to confess to an angel rather than to a priest. But think about it. Would an angel be more understanding? I think it would be very hard to explain to an angel that you were too tired and that was why you did not pray, or why you did or didn't do something. An angel would not understand because an angel is a pure spirit who does not have eyes or ears or a body as we have and so does not have the temptations and sins that we have because of our body. The priest is a man; he goes to confession too. He knows about temptation, about trying to live a good life and trying not to sin but to grow in virtue.

Be sincere, honest and straightforward in confession. Tell the difficult things first and don't give the devil a chance to tempt you to withhold them. What will the priest think of you? Is he going to be shocked by your sins? He has heard so many confessions; it is highly unlikely that you could tell him anything new. Besides, you hurt God, not the priest. The priest is not thinking anything personal against you, he is there representing Christ to forgive you.

In order for you to make a good confession, spend some time thinking about your love for God and about how much God loves you. If you think only

of yourself and of your sins, after a while you will be very disgusted with yourself. Or you might think "I don't want to be hated by everyone, even God. If I do not tell everything in confession, maybe I will feel less guilty or less of a hopeless sinner before God." That does not help anything! God knows anyway and He loves you in spite of your sins. Those same sins are the proof of His love because He already suffered for those sins, He already died even for those sins you are about to confess!

Once St. Francis de Sales heard a man's confession and afterwards, the man said, "Father, now that you know my sins, I am sure you will change your mind about me and you will not respect me anymore." St. Francis said, "Do you think I am like the Pharisees?" "Why would I think that?" asked the man. St. Francis said, "Because the Pharisees looked at Mary Magdalen as a sinful woman even after she was forgiven by Christ. I am not a Pharisee. If Christ died for your sins and I was fortunate enough to give grace back to you, how can you say I would think badly of you or not respect you! You are a holy vessel of God's life!" Like St. Francis, the priest is happy to help a sinner to get back to Christ. Maybe the greater the sinner, the greater will be his ability to receive the compassion and mercy God wants to give him.

If you go to confession and you realize later that you forgot to say a sin, you really forgot, you do not have to go back anxiously right away. The next time you go to confession you can tell that sin. God already gave grace back to you.

After you confess your sins, spend time saying the prayers the priest told you to pray for your penance, and give thanks to God for loving you and for being so good to you. You can be so happy! What a gift, what a miracle happened to you! How beautiful and blessed and pleasing you are to God!

How often should we go to confession? We have to be ready to receive Holy Communion at least once a year, at Easter time; that is our Easter duty. But it is very hard to go to confession if we just go once a year. Whatever we do only once a year does not become a habit. We need to set things right more often because we want to get rid of old habits and build new ones. Also, our confession will usually be much better if we go at least once a month.

We have to confess our mortal sins but should we go to confession even if we do not have any mortal sin to confess? It would be foolish of us not to get rid of our venial sins. Our Lord said to St. Gertrude, "If you have a spot of dirt on your hands, what do you do?" She said, "I wash my hands." Our Lord said, "By washing away that dirt spot, your whole hand

got clean.” So, if by being sorry and confessing all our sins our whole soul would be clean, why wouldn’t we do it?

It is important to make up our mind to do something about those sins we confessed; how will we change? Since we cannot get rid of all our imperfections before we die, it would be wise, and confession would help us better, if we decide to do something about just certain things, or at least make up our mind not to do those acts or think those thoughts as frequently, and we can find the way to lessen the occasions. If we do not make up for our sins before we die, we will have to make up for them in Purgatory before we can go to heaven. When we are making up for our sins while we are still here, we can use the merits of Christ. That is what happens when we do the penance the priest gives us in confession; we are getting help from Christ himself. All prayer is good, but not all prayer is sacramental prayer. Jesus makes it easy for us to make up for our sins by giving us His merits, His help, while we are still here on earth.

Give thanks to God for forgiving us, give thanks to God for His great love!

The "Last Testament" of Jesus

When you love someone and you have to leave that person or persons you love, you do not talk about just anything; you give a last testament, an advice, something you consider very, very important. Then the friend you love could remember you warmly and cherish what you said and follow the advice you left for him. What is the advice that Our Lord left for us? What is that last testament, that last most important commandment?

He did not say "Work a lot!" He did not say "Suffer, because unless you are miserable and unhappy, you cannot go to heaven." He did not say anything like that. What He said was: "Love each other as I love the Father and be united in that love." "As I live in the Father, and the Father in me and we love each other, in the very same way you should be one in me and love each other. This will be the sign that the world will know that you are mine, that you love each other." (cf. *John 13:34-35, 15:9-17, 17:20-26*)

We know that Jesus is not only our Redeemer and Friend, but He is also the One to whom God gave power to judge us when we will meet Him again. What will happen at that meeting? He will ask "Did you do what I told you to do?" When He meets me in heaven, His first question will not be "How

much did you work? How much did you suffer? Did you do very important things, hard things, for me?" The only thing He is interested in is "Do you love me?" (*John 21:17*) And did you love people and all God's creatures for my sake as I told you to? Did people recognize you as a Christian? Did people recognize you as a Christian by the love you showed them? Did you show them, not just any ordinary human love, but a supernatural love for others for the sake of Christ? This is what He is going to ask. This is what will determine which way we will go, to the left or to the right, among His chosen ones or the rejected ones. (*cf. Matthew 25:31-36*) Why? Because He asked us to live by the same Spirit He lived by – the Spirit of Love, divine supernatural love.

What is the love of God? We call Him the Holy Spirit. We know that St. Thomas Aquinas agonized over trying to explain well that, whatever God is, is expressed in the Son, and the Son looks at the Father and sees all: all goodness, all greatness, all beauty. And He knows that this beauty is His because the Father gave Him all that He possessed. And He, the Son, is giving all to the Father, holding nothing back. And that perfect love between the two is alive, is a real Person – the Holy Spirit.

The Father wants to give, and does give, everything to the Son; and the Son gives everything to the

Father. The Father wants and wishes all good to the Son and gives all good to the Son; and the Son's life is to wish and give all good to the Father. We see this even more clearly when the Son comes to this earth and becomes man. His actions are so transparent. He is giving all to the Father, keeping nothing back. This is their Spirit, that Holy Spirit which we call God's own holiness, that self-giving love, holding nothing back, giving everything, and acknowledging and recognizing Himself in the Other! We live by the Spirit of God when we recognize that all we have comes from Him.

I am nothing else but what God thought of me; I would not be here if there was not a thought in God the Father's mind about me. I do not just happen to be. God the Father thought of me and wanted me to be here. And God the Son redeemed me and stays in the Blessed Sacrament personally for me, to be united with me day by day. And God the Holy Spirit took His abode in my soul by the call of my Baptism and considered my soul His dwelling, His holy place.

If we live by His Spirit, we really and truly will give everything back to God as generously as He has given to us. And we will cooperate with God the Son to redeem our soul and the souls of those whom He wants to redeem through us. We give ourselves fully and entirely to Him so that He would be able

to save souls “through me, with me, by me.” This is the good, the greatest good, that we can wish and want for our fellow men. We want God for them, that they would live by the Holy Spirit.

This is not just an ordinary kind of love, making us feel so nice and warm. That would just be a natural type of love, a natural sympathy. Pagans have that kind of love for their fellow men. But that is not the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is: wishing the greatest good for others, wishing God for them! Actually, this is the love with which we are to love those we teach. In a way, we are giving God to them by teaching them about God, letting them know how good and lovable He is. This is the love of the Holy Spirit working in us because we are helping them to love God. We are being an instrument of grace for them because if they do not know God, they cannot love Him. Grace builds on nature.

This is how we can do good for people. Not by crying over them because they are hungry or homeless or are having a hard time. That would be a natural kind of love. Anyone, even people without religion, can do that. To love with the Spirit of God is much more than just giving someone a piece of bread or meat. We want to give them God!

How can you live by the Spirit of God? By the Heart of Jesus! His Heart is the Heart of the High Priest.

The priests' vocation is to be the mediator between God and man. He is called to love the people with the Heart of the High Priest, with the Spirit of Jesus! The Spirit made the Heart of Jesus tremble and beat for the good of people, wishing them God, wishing them divine grace!

There are many ways we can get those necessary graces for people who need it the most: through prayer, sacrifice, the sacraments. But let us not forget that what we give is not really ours. What we give belongs to Jesus. If we would give what is ours, we would be giving very little, something very finite. Jesus, our High Priest, in His goodness makes His treasures available to us. Here again we can see the goodness, the unselfishness of the three divine Persons. Our Lord is so unselfish in letting us use His merits! This is more than all the money in the whole world that we could ever earn to give away to the poor. Through Our Lord we can give people the greatest treasure in the whole universe! We could not do this on our own. Jesus made it possible for us because He is so good! During the Mass, we know the same thing happens as happened on Calvary. It depends on us whether we are just spectators or if we are uniting ourselves with the sacrifice of Our Lord and with His merits.



Sister Ida and Isabel on scaffolding in front of fresco
at Holy Cross Mausoleum, Culver City, California

Sacred Heart of Jesus - Artist / Isabel Piczek

Sister Ida knew and loved Isabel Piczek for decades and inspired her as friend and artist. In the 1990's, Sister Ida asked Isabel to artistically adorn the Heart of Jesus Retreat Center in Santa Ana, CA. Together, Sister Ida and Isabel planned the themes of all the stained glass windows and murals. Sister Ida followed the progress of the stained glass windows with joyful enthusiasm to the very end of her life.

With her extraordinary God-given talent and her deep faith, Isabel Piczek spent her life and energy on enriching the Church with her uniquely magnificent sacred art. Her frescos, stained glass windows and mosaics can be seen in seven countries on three continents in 500 churches, chapels and cathedrals, including the national Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC and in the Vatican Biblicum.

In her eulogy at Sister Ida's funeral, Isabel said, "Sister Ida introduced into this world a new concept of sainthood. What she has shown us is that God Himself is the real Joy, Hope and Energy, not someone to fear and hide from, but to love, to thoroughly enjoy and to realize that He is Fun, more so than anything and anyone else on earth."



Servant of God
Sister Ida Peterfy, SDSH

1922-2000

Foundress, Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart

When does a Religious Community begin? Who are the people God chooses and calls for such a task of extraordinary faith, zeal and love?

This is the story of the dynamic action of God in the life of Sister Ida Peterfy and the Sisters of the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart. There were no extraordinary signs given to her; only the interior call of God which she recognized and responded to in the silence of her heart.

It was the summer of 1939 and the Mayor of Kassa, Hungary, requested that the Girl Scouts direct a two week camp for underprivileged children. Ida, a vivacious 16 year old at the time, was enjoying a summer vacation in the beautiful northern region of Hungary. She was asked to take the leadership role and, unhesitatingly, she gave up her vacation to fill the need. Her heart went out to the 120 little children who needed to develop a relationship



Sister Ida with a camper

with God and with each other. To teach them, she developed a method with lively dramatizations and imaginative visual aids. In the summer of 1940, Ida once again led the two week camp program. At the close of the camp she made her first three day silent retreat.

It was during this quiet

time of prayer and reflection that God spoke to Ida in a way which would penetrate her heart and alter her life. With no external signs nor miraculous gifts, it was simply, yet profoundly, the Word of God finding a home in the heart of a 17 year old girl. The deep realization that "God knows me by name, and loves me personally" and "God cares for the children facing the threat of Nazism and Communism" brought forth the response in her: "But who will teach these children about God?" The stereotypical answer: "The Church will do it," did not sound right to her anymore. In prayer it became obvious to Ida: "You are the Church, it is up to you; you need to work that they would know God." The extraordinary had taken place, the reality of God's personal love had been heard and responded to.

With the support of the Retreat Director and with the approval of Msgr. Nicolas Pfeiffer, her spiritual mentor, Ida was ready to offer her life to God. Upon her 18th birthday she made private vows of chastity, poverty and obedience in the Franciscan Church in Kassa, before the Blessed Sacrament and in the company of one of the first members of the sprouting Community. Thus began the fascinating and inspiring ministry of Sister Ida Peterfy and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart which, in time, became a fully approved Religious Congregation in the Catholic Church, the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

While Sister Ida was organizing the youth to

participate in the Consecration of the city of Kassa to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Hermine Jaschko, Aurelia Majorossy, and Eva Batta were drawn by her zeal and also committed their lives to God in the Community.



Sister Hermine, Sister Aurelia and Sister Ida in back row after their 1st 8-day retreat in 1942
Sister Ida's mother is in the front row on the right

The years of World War II, followed by the Communist occupation, seemed to be the bleakest and least stable time in Europe. Yet the innovative teaching methods of Sister Ida and the growing number of companions proved to be the message of hope in God's love to many of Hungary's teachers, youth and children. Undaunted by the threats of the Communist regime and the imprisonment of Sister Aurelia in a Russian labor camp, the Sisters continued their work and apostolic accomplishments. They never considered leaving Hungary. However, after the arrest of Cardinal József Mindszenty, Sister Ida was encouraged by Church leaders to leave the country with the Sisters in order to continue their work in the free world. It became apparent to Sister Ida that God had very different plans for her and for the Community. She continued to trust and follow God's call.

On February 14, 1949 Sister Ida and a companion

escaped from Hungary to Austria and prepared the way for the Community to follow. In June 1949, Sister Ida immigrated to Canada and made preparations for the Sisters' voyage. On August 15, 1950 Sister Hermine Jaschko, Sister Eva Batta, Sister Aurelia Majorossy, Sister Agnes Raday, and Sister Helen Clare Nagy arrived safely in Toronto.

It took insight, courage and determination for Sister Ida and the young Community to not be diverted from their original religious education ministry because of the language barrier. Conducting a summer school for the children of Hungarian tobacco farmers led to the Sisters' actual labor in the tobacco harvest. Through this hard work, they acquired enough funds to establish a printing shop. Thus they chose to work with their hands, while gaining fluency in English, rather than compromise their original goal of religious education.

By 1954, the Sisters were ready to share their spiritual knowledge and teaching methods in English. They formed volunteers to be catechists and through their leadership programs the youth of Toronto actively participated in the Marian Year. The Sisters reached out to the newly arrived Chinese college students, and with Sister Ida's *Five Step Illustrated Method*, the Sisters were delighted to find that they could communicate and teach well, ethnic and cultural barriers melting away.



Sister Ida with TIME Magazine interviewer

With the impact of their teaching and the example of their lives, news of the Sisters' work began to spread. By 1956, the Canadian edition of Time Magazine had published an article on the Community.

Recognized by several Bishops during the Religious Education Congress in Buffalo, New York, Sister Ida was asked to bring the Community to work in several dioceses. Accepting Bishop Robert J. Dwyer's invitation in November 1956, a convent was established in Reno, Nevada in 1957. Simultaneously, upon the invitation of Cardinal James Francis McIntyre, the Motherhouse and Novitiate of the Community were opened in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, California.

The Community's steady growth could be seen both in numbers and in accomplishments. Sister Ida, Sister Eva, and Sister Agnes were the first to give Teacher Formation courses in the Archdiocese and the Sisters participated in Religious Education Programs and in Summer Schools of Religion. Young women from Southern California, the Midwest, the East Coast, and from Hong Kong entered this vibrant, joyful and dedicated Community of the Sacred Heart Sisters.

During the 1960's, the Sisters led Youth Retreats, popular now, but a striking innovation at the time. In their new country they continued their favorite program: summer camps for children. The camps provided an opportunity for the children to hear the Word of God and to rejoice in God's love in the midst of created beauty. Schools of Prayer for adults and Family Retreat Camps were established to support the family unit.

In 1970, the Sisters' most expansive ministry was to be realized: they reached out through the media to vast numbers of children, producing twenty-seven, half hour religious education programs *"My Friend,*



Sister Ida with Pookie the bear

Pookie" for ABC-TV, at the request of the LA Archdiocese. The Sisters were, unknowingly, honing the skills and talents which would later be used to produce the celebrated Video Catechesis Series, the *Sacred Heart Kids' Club*, bringing joyful help in teaching to catechists worldwide.

Confirmation of their ongoing work took the form of the Society's First General Chapter in 1976. The Chapter reestablished Sister Ida as Superior General and sanctioned the Constitutions re-formulated by her. The Constitutions were approved by Cardinal Timothy Manning in 1980

and received the approval of the Holy See in 1985.

While Sister Ida remained the spiritual inspiration of the community, the 1982 Chapter elected Sister Eva Batta as Superior General. In 1988, Sister Jane Stafford became the first American to hold the position of Superior General.

The end of the seventies was marked by a multitude of blessings, as the Sisters launched the Heart of Jesus Retreat Center in Santa Ana, California. The generosity of a loving benefactor, combined with the spirited fundraising led by Sister Ida and Sister Jane, produced the necessary resources to acquire a 23 acre property in Big Bear Lake, California. In 1980 the Sisters opened Sacred Heart Retreat Camp, with a Lodge to accommodate 200



Sister Ida teaching the Sacraments
at Family Camp held at
Sacred Heart Retreat Camp in Big Bear Lake

people. Both of these centers established unique locations for the Sisters' continuing work and steadfast commitment to the spiritual enrichment of children, youth and adults, with special focus on family apostolate.

In 1985, after prayerful consideration, the small Community recognized the need to establish a mission in Taiwan. This ministry provides help to

the people both within the fields of medicine and religious education.

Sister Ida and her Sisters could be found in a variety of Religious Education ministries from teaching children, youth and adults to directing parish religious education programs, sacramental programs, RCIA, indeed any place where the Word and love of God are proclaimed.

In response to a growing need for catechist formation, Sister Ida produced a video course, *Be a Dynamic and Effective Religion Teacher*. Through it, her unique catechetical method, *The Five Step Illustrated Method*, brings success to catechists and educators in places previously beyond the Sisters' reach.



Sr. Judith Fogassy, Sister Ida, Sr. Shannon Stafford,
Sr. Jane Stafford and Sr. Eva Batta
at the blessing of the convent in Hungary

The spiritual needs of Hungary and the surrounding countries in Europe are close to the hearts of the Sisters. In 1992 a missionary team of Sisters was sent back to Hungary, the place where Sister Ida initially received the inspiration of the Lord to begin the Community.

Sister Ida's leadership in the Community continued through teaching the novices, giving

retreats and monthly seminars to the Sisters, being actively involved in the Community's government and traveling as a religious education speaker both nationally and internationally.

A diagnosis of non-Hodgkins lymphoma in 1995 did not deter Sister Ida from making the Father's love known. While undergoing chemotherapy, she gave a 30 day retreat to Sisters who had recently made their perpetual profession. She spiritually led the Community in the anticipation and celebration of the Great Jubilee in the year 2000 and was the first to cross through the Holy Door erected for the event.



Sister Ida entering through the Holy Door assisted by Bishop Gerald Wilkerson and Sister Jane Stafford

Sister Ida's life on earth ended as it had been lived, focused on the One she had given her life to and surrounded by her Sisters who joined her in this love. She passed on to eternal life on February 8, 2000 in the Motherhouse of the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart in Northridge, California.

The celebration of the Mass of Resurrection was indeed a celebration. Cardinal Roger Mahony, the main celebrant, mentioned the special and

wonderful grace of this moment, "These are moments that we read about in the lives of holy men and women. We were blessed, for whatever reason in God's providence, to have Sister Ida here, to have the opportunity to know her and love her... we also pray that we would be able to capture that spirit of Sister Ida in our own commitment of faith in Christ, and in our lives we would live out the discipleship which she lived out to the full, and shared with us in such a visionary fashion."

"The Joyful Apostolate must go on," said then Archbishop Justin Rigali in his homily at the funeral. "Sister Ida, in her legacy of generous love, still speaks to us." This rite of Christian burial "is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving for the love of God manifested in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and reflected in the gentle life and zealous devotion of our Sister Ida."

Even though Sister Ida's earthly life has ended, the Joyful Apostolate continues on through her Sisters' catechetical works in her spirit. It is obvious that it is God who moves the hearts of these dedicated women and that they take Sister Ida's final words to them to heart: *"I think my message was, from day one to day last, that if you don't love God, you don't love Jesus, you don't love each other, and then the people, then somehow you are missing the point of life."*

The significance and impact of the Sacred Heart Sisters' accomplishments in the field of Religious Education continues to be globally recognized.

To know Sister Ida's Sisters is to know the love, grace, and simplicity of God as Sister Ida often expressed it:

God has a heart for you.



Ask Sister Ida's intercession

Most Loving God,
you called Sister Ida to teach and live
Your Truth and Your message of love
in a joyful and inspiring way.

May her example also inspire us
to live in faith and draw others
to Your Sacred Heart

Through the intercession of Your Servant,
grant us the following grace which we ask
from Your loving kindness:

(here make your request).

We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

For more information, to request materials,
to share a testimonial of Sister Ida's heroic virtue,
or to report any grace obtained through her intercession, contact:

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From a Leadership Retreat Sister Ida gave in 1970:

I am not going to tell you *about* God; we are putting ourselves in His presence. He is here. I never called him "Creator." When Moses asked him, "Who are you?" He said, "I Am Who Am." "I am full of life! I am alive!" He never said, "I am the Creator." We said that about him. He said He is alive. He is our life too. He is so close. How about spending a little time just to be with Him, not to *think about* Him, but to *be with* Him.

He knows us. How well? More than your mother knows you, or your best friend. He loved you first. This is why you can love - because He loved you. He is the fullness of love. He sees us, loves us, wants us to get in contact with him. How about giving a little time just to be with Him? Instead of seeing and being with each other, think of Him who is so real, so loving and so lovable and spend this time with Him.

What is He like? How does He talk about himself? Jesus is the image of the Father - God, made visible to us. He wants to tell us about the Father. He is the source of all good. God is all for us! Let's think about this tremendous love. He is turning to us, opening his arms, embracing us, kissing us tenderly. Let's feel the great love He has for us. Respond to it. Be grateful.

♥ your Sister Ida

Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart



www.sacredheartsisters.com

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Sacred Heart of Jesus, Artistic rendition of Mosaic

at St. Columban Catholic Church, Garden Grove, CA

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