



A PASTORAL LETTER

On Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

To be read at all Masses on 4th Sunday of Lent

27th March 2022

My dear brothers and sisters,

The suffering of the people of the Ukraine and the dark clouds of war over Europe, lead me to write on this mid-Lent Sunday. On a Sunday which rejoices in motherhood, I invite you to call on the mother who was given to us at the foot of the Cross. On Calvary, the Crucified Lord entrusted to His beloved disciple His mother Mary saying, *“This is your mother”*.ⁱ Saint John Paul II reflected that when Jesus then said, *“Woman, this is your son”* He opened His Mother’s heart, the Immaculate Heart of Mary *“... revealing to it the new dimensions and extent of the love to which she was called in the Holy Spirit and by the power of the sacrifice of the Cross”*.ⁱⁱ This mother’s love extends to all, as Pope Francis has prayed *“We turn to you and knock at the door of your heart. We are your beloved children”*.ⁱⁱⁱ It is to Mary and for a mother’s help that we now turn at this troubled hour of history. We cannot forget that the peoples of the Ukraine and Russia have been united over the centuries in great love and veneration for the Holy Mother of God who is also our mother.

On Friday, in union with all the bishops of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis consecrated humanity and especially Russia and the Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Holy Father was consciously responding to the Gospel message of prayer and repentance that was entrusted to the children of Fatima during the Great War of 1914-1918. This is the same message which Saint Paul announces for us at this halfway point of Lent, *“In Christ’s name ... be reconciled to God”*.^{iv} It is the message of the parable of a lost son returning to his father’s embrace saying, *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you”*.^v We recognise that it is human sin which takes away the peace of the world, the peace of families and of whole societies. Sin takes away our own peace and when this rejection of God becomes definitive, it removes our hope of everlasting peace.

Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means returning to the open Heart of her Son on the Cross. It is an invitation for all our hearts to be open to Divine love and the grace of repentance.

The prayerful entrustment of humanity to Mary's Immaculate Heart, calls us to accept her motherly help in returning to the very source of redemption and never to lose hope.

In the face of the violence and agony of war we have witnessed a greatness of heart in the generous response of so many people, not least in our Shrewsbury Diocese. Before the daily scenes of anguish in the Ukraine, we have sought to support the victims of this conflict and have prayed for peace. In seeking the intercession of the pure heart of Mary we are led to trust that the power of Redemption is greater than all the destructive power of sin and evil. The Immaculate Heart leads us unfailingly to the fountain of redemption and grace flowing from the sacrifice of the Cross and the Eucharist, which is Christ's one sacrifice.^{vi} This is the profession of faith we make whenever we kneel to confess our sins; or to adore, receive and share in the offering of the Holy Eucharist.

We each have our part in this consecration, by accepting Our Lady's motherly help in opening our hearts more fully to the grace of God and all that is asked of us in the duty of each day. The children of Fatima had no human means to overcome war and bring peace to the world. Two of these children would die in the global pandemic of a century ago and are numbered among the Saints. Yet, by a renewed love for the Eucharist and a new faithfulness to prayer, especially the prayer of Mary's heart in the Rosary;^{vii} and by the offering of the small sacrifices of each day, these children sought to follow the path of Mary's heart and open the way for the world to receive God's gift of peace.

This is the invitation now given to us as we entrust ourselves and our world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In Pope Francis's words addressed to Our Lady, *"The 'fiat' (let it be done to me according to your word) that arose from your heart opened the doors of history to the Prince of Peace. We trust, that through your heart, peace will dawn once more ... To you we consecrate the future of the whole human family ..."*.^{viii} On this Sunday, it is truly for a mother's help that we call.

United with you in this prayer and consecration,

+ Mark

Bishop of Shrewsbury

ⁱ Jn. 19:26

ⁱⁱ Homily of Pope Saint John Paul II at Fatima 13th May 1982

ⁱⁱⁱ Act of Consecration 25th March 2022

^{iv} II Cor. 5:20

^v Lk. 15: 21

^{vi} Catechism of the Catholic Church no. 1367

^{vii} Cf. Lk. 2: 19

^{viii} Act of Consecration 25th March 2022