

RUMBLINGS FROM THE BUNKER

IS THE SACRED HEART A SPOOKY IMAGE?

I was in a house recently, and the granny, who lived with the family, had asked me to bless a very old picture of the Sacred Heart, which she had brought with her, as one of a few prized possessions. She had come to live with her daughter, and her family. It was obvious to me that most of the them in the house were not too keen on this old picture. Clearly the daughter and son-in-law were going to tolerate this picture out of respect for the old lady. There was a teenage girl in the house, called Cathy, and whilst I have no doubt she loves her granny very much she just could not hide her feelings about the picture. 'It's scary, Fr. Joe, I don't like it!', she blurted. 'What do you mean it's scary?', I asked. 'Well for a start I don't like the way the eyes are sort of flickering upwards, and you can see the whites of them, and the worst bit, is the way you can see the heart, it's a bit gory, like spooky'. I could hear how sincere she was and I got what she said. Just then she gave me an opportunity, 'do you not think so?', she asked.

I think Cathy was a bit surprised, when I answered her question, with another question. "Do you like the locket your Mum is wearing?", 'Oh yes', she said, 'it's beautiful, my Dad bought it for her, years ago'. 'Why?' I asked rather bluntly. 'Because he's mad about her!' she offered equally bluntly. We all smiled, as her Mum rubbed her finger and thumb over the lovely heart shaped locket. 'And tell me Cathy, do you like chocolate?', I asked. At this stage Mum, Dad, Granny and Cathy are all looking at me very strangely. What followed was a very interesting conversation on cards, and St. Valentine's Day, and heart shaped boxes of chocolates. Once we got to the popular, soft, and cuddly heart I gently brought it back to the heart in the picture. As you know it's a heart on fire, and if you look closely it's entwined with thorns. What's this all about?

In the picture of the Sacred Heart, the fire in the heart is unique. Unlike the fire of love in the human heart, which can be dampened down, if not extinguished, through betrayal, or loss. The flame of divine love never goes out. This picture reminds us we are loved, We are loved, beyond measure, unconditionally. The love Jesus has for us, is passionate. Jesus is mad about us. Jesus delights in us. The great joy of Jesus is, when we turn towards him. The thorns of love are also something we know about. I am sure you have experienced the pain of unrequited love. No one can hurt us, cut us more deeply, than our beloved. Many of the thorns we encounter, we bring on ourselves. Despite our best efforts, we love conditionally, failing in basic communication, falling back into selfish paranoia. At this stage, we can often, make a bad situation worse, by playing games, checking each others motivation, and setting each other little tests. The thorns around the heart of Jesus in the picture, under discussion, are of course, not deserved. These are the thorns of indifference, neglect and direct hostility. The heart of Jesus, the Sacred Heart, is bound by the thorns of a world that turns its back on divine love. Here in Ireland, as we slide into the New Pagan Age, the thorns abound and tighten. Violence stalks the city, ruthless and remorseless. The country fails to provide the basics of a home, and meaningful work, for thousands of its citizens. Suicide rates continue to rise. The crucial issue of mental health is underfunded and fails to get the priority it deserves. The tyranny of addiction continues to wreak havoc not only on individuals but on whole communities. Many use the word 'empty' to describe their recurring mood. In addition, we as individuals, in our natural desire to feel loved and fulfilled, often chase rainbows and travel down many cul de sacs. It will probably take a long time, but eventually Ireland will return to Jesus. It would be nice to think the Irish Church will play a relevant, if not a key part, in this return. I believe this will only happen if the Church can manage to embark on an extensive programme of reform and renewal. Meanwhile the fire that never goes out is there for us all. It is the fire of love, most specifically the fire of divine love. So is the Sacred Heart picture, a spooky, gory, dated image? No, rather for me, it is a beautiful, and timely reminder that no matter how many, how sharp or how long the thorns we encounter, the love of Jesus will triumph. Perhaps as never before, we need to turn towards the loving and living heart of Jesus. 'O Sacred Heart of Jesus we place all our trust in thee.'

Faternally, JoeMcD 30.05.26