

# First Friday Devotion

Jesus made the following 12 promises to St. Margaret Mary in favor of those who consecrate to the Sacred Heart, in a spirit of reparation, the First Friday of each month.

1. I will give them all the graces necessary in their state of life.
2. I will establish peace in their homes.
3. I will comfort them in all their afflictions.
4. I will be their secure refuge during life, and above all, in death.
5. I will bestow abundant blessings upon all their undertakings.
6. Sinners will find in My Heart the source and infinite ocean of mercy.
7. Lukewarm souls shall become fervent.
8. Fervent souls shall quickly mount to high perfection.
9. I will bless every place in which an image of My Heart is exposed and honored.
10. I will give to priests the gift of touching the most hardened hearts.
11. Those who shall promote this devotion shall have their names written in My Heart.
12. I promise you in the excessive mercy of My Heart that My all powerful love will grant to all those who receive

Holy Communion on the First Fridays in nine consecutive months the grace of final perseverance; they shall not die in My disgrace, nor without receiving their sacraments. My divine Heart shall be their safe refuge in this last moment. The Church grants a Plenary indulgence to those who attend Mass and receive Communion in honor of The Sacred Heart of Jesus on the First Friday of each month for nine (9) consecutive months.

## Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus



Lord, have mercy on us.  
Christ, have mercy on us.  
Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, hear us.  
Christ, graciously hear us.

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, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, substantially united to the Word of God, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, of Infinite Majesty, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, Sacred Temple of God, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, Tabernacle of the Most High, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, House of God and Gate of Heaven, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, burning furnace of charity, have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, abode of justice and love, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, full of goodness and love, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, abyss of all virtues, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, most worthy of all praise, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, king and center of all hearts, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, in whom are all treasures of wisdom and knowledge, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, in whom dwells the fullness of divinity, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, in whom the Father was well pleased, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, of whose fullness we have all received, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, desire of the everlasting hills, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, patient and most merciful, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, enriching all who invoke Thee, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, fountain of life and holiness, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, propitiation for our sins, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, loaded down with opprobrium, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, bruised for our offenses, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, obedient to death, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, pierced with a lance, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, source of all consolation, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, our life and resurrection, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, our peace and our reconciliation, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, victim for our sins, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, salvation of those who trust in Thee, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, hope of those who die in Thee, have mercy on us.  
Heart of Jesus, delight of all the Saints, have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, spare us, O Lord.  
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, graciously hear us, O Lord.  
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us, O Lord.

V. Jesus, meek and humble of heart.  
R. Make our hearts like to Thine.

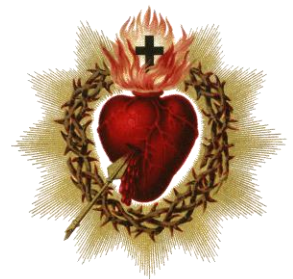
Let us pray.

Almighty and eternal God, look upon the Heart of Your most beloved Son and upon the praises and satisfaction which He offers You in the name of sinners; and to those who implore Your mercy, in Your great goodness, grant forgiveness in the name of the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with Thee forever and ever. Amen.

## Prayer of Consecration

O Sacred Heart of Jesus, filled with infinite love, broken by my ingratitude, pierced by my sins, yet loving me still, accept the consecration that I make to you of all that I am and of that I have.

Take every faculty of my soul and body and draw me day by day nearer and nearer to your Most Sacred Heart, and there as I can bear the lesson, teach me your blessed ways. Amen



Why do Catholics today celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus? After all, we don't have feast days dedicated to any other organs of Jesus' body. There's no "Solemnity of the Arm of Jesus," for instance, to honor his baptisms and healings. So why a feast day for his *heart*?

Biblically, the heart is "our hidden center." Scripture refers to the heart more than a thousand times, often, as the *Catechism* (CCC) notes, in the context of prayer (2562-63). The greatest commandment of the Law is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5, Mark 12:30). In speaking of the *Sacred Heart*, then, we're referring to the *person* of Jesus, to his *humanity*, and to his love for the Father and for us, what the Dicastery for Divine Worship (DDW) calls his "infinite divine-human love for the Father and for his brothers." In a special way, the image of the Sacred Heart captures the moment in which that love was poured out for us on the cross, when a soldier pierced the side of Christ, and blood and water flowed out (John 19:34).

As the DDW notes, we find devotion to the Sacred Heart throughout the Middle Ages, but it goes from being a personal devotion to a liturgical feast in no small part in response to the heresy of Jansenism. In the words of Pope Pius XI, "the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was instituted at a time when men were oppressed by the sad and gloomy severity of Jansenism, which had made their hearts grow cold, and shut them out from the love of God and the hope of salvation."

So what was the Jansenist heresy, and how was the Sacred Heart an answer to it?

**Although the heresy of Jansenism is sometimes unfairly oversimplified**, there were three particular features of the heresy that (inadvertently) produced disastrous effects. The first was a *double predestination*: that God destined some for heaven and others for hell, irrespective of merits. As Leszek Kołakowski traces in his book *God Owes Us Nothing*, Jansenist theology argued that God gives some people the graces necessary for salvation and withholds them from others (pp. 31-35). The result of this idea would be that some people are going to hell, and there's literally nothing they can do about it. They aren't saved—not because they refuse God's overtures, but simply because God doesn't want to save them.

The second feature regarded *imperfect contrition*, sometimes known as *attrition*. In simple terms: If I turn away from my sin out of fear of hell (rather than out of love of God), is that good enough to be forgiven? The *Catechism* (1453) now clarifies: by itself, "imperfect contrition cannot obtain the forgiveness of grave sins"; however, imperfect contrition *is* sufficient to receive absolution through the sacrament of penance, since imperfect contrition can be perfected through the sacramental graces flowing from the confessional. But the Jansenists taught the opposite: that even for a valid sacramental confession, a penitent needed *perfect contrition*. Worse, Jansenist priests "routinely withheld absolution, in the belief that few penitents demonstrated sufficient precision and adequate contrition."

Third, because so few people could count on perfect contrition, Jansenists warned against receiving Communion frequently, in a misguided attempt to avoid the scandal of unworthy reception.

What was the combined effect of these three teachings? That ordinary Catholics doubted God's love for them; doubted whether they were (or could be) forgiven, even after going to confession; and stayed away from the body and blood of Christ in Communion out of fear, thereby depriving themselves of sacramental graces. The resulting vision of God was thereby distorted. As Pius XI would later recount, "God was not to be loved as a father but rather to be feared as an implacable judge."

This is an important insight. It's not just that Jansenism got the details of predestination or contrition or sacramental reception wrong. It's that Jansenism got *God* wrong, in a fundamental way that many of us still get him wrong today.

**Perhaps it is only fitting, then, that it was God himself** who set things straight. Whereas multiple seventeenth- and eighteenth-century popes vainly tried to quash Jansenism, Jesus intervened in an unexpected way: through a series of apparitions to a French nun named Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690). In the last and most famous of these apparitions, Jesus showed her his heart and said,

Behold the heart which has so loved men that it has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming Itself, in order to testify Its love; and in return, I receive from the greater part only ingratitude, by their irreverence and sacrilege, and by the coldness and contempt they have for me in this sacrament of love.

Theologically, this is the corrective Jansenism needed. Jesus did not deny any of what Jansenism was getting right: that sin offends God, that so many of us seem indifferent to God, that we can slip into ingratitude toward God with startling ease. But rather than express this in terms of divine wrath, Jesus presents it as a tragedy of unrequited love. That is, sinners act this way not because God denies them the graces to do otherwise, but because they fail to appreciate the depth and breadth of God's love for them. Jesus saw the same problem that the Jansenists saw, but he answered it with open arms and an open heart.

A great difficulty in believing in God's love and mercy is simply accepting that God is so radically *other*. It's hard to wrap our minds around the idea that the uncreated and unchanging God of the universe has a personal love for us. And so Jesus reminds us that he has a human heart, and with it, the full range of human emotions. Yet he is fully divine as well as fully human. Thus, our devotion is not just to the heart, but to the *Sacred Heart*. Jesus has at once the full experience of human emotions *and* the perfect vision of divine foreknowledge.

**Pius XI illustrates the implications** of this divine-human union in a beautiful reflection on Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. On the one hand, he points out that it was chiefly "because of our sins also which were as yet in the future, but were foreseen" that the soul of Christ became "very sorrowful, even to death" (Matt. 26:38). In other words, what weighed upon Christ was not principally the looming shadow of the cross, but the weight of our sins.

But there is a happy corollary to this idea: that when we read that "there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him," this should also be taken as Christ foreseeing our acts of reparation to the Sacred Heart, that "his heart, oppressed with weariness and anguish, might find consolation." And so, the pope concludes, "even now, in a wondrous yet true manner, we can and ought to console that most Sacred Heart which is continually wounded by the sins of thankless men."

This is a wonderful and mind-bending insight. The promise of the Sacred Heart is that our actions *today* are wrapped up (through God's perfect foreknowledge) with Christ's experience in Gethsemane, that we are either adding one more burden to him through our sins, or giving him one more consolation through our acts of love and reparation. And so (in yet another encyclical on the Sacred Heart!) Pius XI encouraged that "the Feast of the Sacred Heart be for the whole Church one of holy rivalry of reparation and supplication," in which we hasten in large numbers "to the foot of the altar to adore the redeemer of the world, under the veils of the sacrament," pouring our hearts out to his. What better way can we celebrate the triumph of Jesus' love over the cold justice of Jansenism and our false conceptions of God?

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### History of Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Devotion to the Sacred Heart can be seen as early as the second century with St. Justin Martyr and in the 7th century with Pope Gregory the Great. Writers throughout these centuries emphasized the pierced side of Christ as the inexhaustible source from which all graces flow upon mankind and the blood and water as symbols of the sacraments of the Church. With the coming of St. Bernard of Clairvaux and St. Anselm in the 12th century, there was a sudden increase in direct reference to the love of the Sacred Heart for every person redeemed by His Passion and Death. The widespread influence of Franciscan and Dominican Friars enkindled this devotion in the hearts of the faithful who heard their preaching. The focus on the Sacred Heart moved from being a symbol of the sacraments, to the symbol of Divine Love.

One cannot pass over the Middle Ages without mentioning Saints Gertrude and Mechtild. The editor of St. Gertrude's writings, Revelations, (Dom Boutrais of Soesmes) stated: "Never before...has anything been written on the effect of the divine Heart and its relation to men, to saints, to the souls in Purgatory, such as we find in the writings of St. Gertrude and St. Mechtild.

The contemplation of the Humanity of Christ in His Passion, devotion to the Blessed Eucharist (in particular the feast of Corpus Christi), and the surge of mysticism gave the devotion to the Sacred Heart a new vitality in the Middle Ages. Prior to the revelations to St. Margaret Mary religious communities, particularly in France, continued to spread devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus throughout the world. The French spiritual leaders paved the way for the message given to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque.

St. Margaret Mary entered the Daughters of the Visitation, founded by St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane Frances de Chantal, in 1671. Although devotion to the Heart of Jesus was already important to the

order prior to St. Margaret Mary's entrance, it would be through her that public devotion to the Sacred Heart (reparation, consecration and a liturgical feast) would be practiced universally in the Catholic Church. St. Francis de Sales wrote, "Our little congregation is the work of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Our dying Savior gave birth to us by the wound in His Sacred Heart." St. Jane told her daughters, "Pray that your heart may be made like to the Heart of Jesus." It was to this Order that Jesus gave the deepest knowledge of His Sacred Heart and the express command to spread devotion to It.

During this time, the heresy of Jansenism was spreading like wild fire throughout Europe. The Jansenists instilled fear into the hearts of the faithful, turning the religion of faith and love into one of pessimism and scrupulosity, teaching that man is completely incapable of disposing himself to the grace offered by God. Frequent Communion was also frowned upon.

In contrast to his, between the years of 1673 and 1675 Jesus appeared to St. Margaret Mary revealing His Divine Heart to her. In one apparition He told her, "My Divine Heart is so passionately in love with humanity, and with you in particular, that it cannot keep back the pent-up flames of its burning charity any longer. They must burst out through you." Our Lord mourned the indifference and ingratitude of the greater part of humanity. Christ asked for the communion of reparation on 9 First Fridays. He also requested that there be a special liturgical feast for His Sacred Heart in the Universal Church to be celebrated eight days after the Solemnity of Corpus Christi. On that day He asked for a solemn act of reparation for all the offenses heaped upon Him in the Blessed Sacrament.

St. Margaret Mary was a cloistered nun and so to help her carry out the mission entrusted to her, Our Lord brought St. Claude la Columbiere, a Jesuit priest, to her to be her Spiritual Director. He was the first to believe in the revelations of the Sacred Heart to St. Margaret Mary. Thanks to his support, her superior also believed, and wide spread propagation of the devotion to the Sacred Heart in the Universal Church began. From then on, the Jesuits became the chief propagators of the devotion to the Sacred Heart which flourished throughout the subsequent centuries.

The Holy See has given this devotion a high place of importance in the Church due not only to the requests of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary but also to the soundness of the doctrine and its timeliness in rekindling love and trust in the Merciful Heart of Our Savior. Pope Pius XI, in the encyclical MISERENTISSIMUS REDEMPTOR, writes about the meaning of the vision of the Sacred Heart. "He showed His Heart to us bearing about it the symbols of the passion and displaying the flames of love, that from the one we might know the infinite malice of sin, and in the other we might admire the infinite charity of Our Redeemer, and so might have a more vehement hatred of sin, and make a more ardent return of love for His love." In this encyclical, Pope Pius stressed that reparation to the Sacred Heart is obligatory for all Christians. He ends his encyclical stating that the devotion of reparation to the Sacred Heart has the highest approval of Apostolic Authority and must be practiced universally by all Christians.

Following the visions and writings of St. Margaret Mary and St. Claude la Columbiere, many Popes have written on the immense importance of devotion to the Sacred Heart including: Leo XIII, Benedict XV, Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and our current Holy Father, Benedict XVI. On the 50th anniversary of Pope Pius XII's encyclical Haurietis Aquas on devotion to the Sacred Heart, Pope Benedict wrote, "This devotion (to the Sacred Heart) is 'the contemplation of the 'side pierced by the spear,' in which shines the limitless will of salvation on the part of God.'" For this reason, "it cannot be considered as a passing form of worship or devotion. Adoration of the love of God, which has found in the symbol of the 'pierced heart' its historical-devotional expression, continues to be vital for a living relationship with God."

The Devotion to the Divine Mercy, given to St. Faustina Kowalska in 1931, is a broadened devotion to the Sacred Heart. From this devotion our trust in God's limitless love and mercy is rekindled. The incomprehensible treasures which we have in the sacraments are symbolized in the blood and water gushing forth from the Heart of Christ. The devotion to the Sacred Heart has flowered and has seemed to come full circle in the devotion to the Divine Mercy, particularly in its emphasis on the graces flowing from the Heart of Jesus, healing and forgiving souls, through the Sacraments of Mercy.

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## Summery of Sacred Heart vs. Jansenism

The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus arose, in part, as a response to the errors of Jansenism. Jansenism, a theological movement within Catholicism, emphasized God's severity and judgment, fostering a pessimistic view of humanity and downplaying God's mercy and love. The Sacred Heart devotion, with its focus on Christ's merciful love, offered a counter-narrative to this perspective. Here's a more detailed explanation:

- **Jansenism's Core Beliefs:**

Jansenism, named after Bishop Cornelius Jansenius, stressed the depravity of human nature and the irresistibility of God's grace. It taught that humans were incapable of responding to God's grace due to their fallen nature and that God's love was primarily one of wrath and judgment. This led to a sense of fear and despair among the faithful.

- **The Sacred Heart as a Counter-Movement:**

The devotion to the Sacred Heart, popularized by figures like Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, emphasized God's merciful love, forgiveness, and the accessibility of His grace. It highlighted Christ's open heart as a symbol of His love and desire for union with humanity.

- **Addressing Jansenist Fears:**

The Jansenist perspective often led to a rigid moralism and a reluctance to approach the sacraments frequently. The Sacred Heart devotion, with its emphasis on God's mercy, encouraged a more open and hopeful approach to faith, particularly through frequent reception of the Eucharist.

- **Examples of the Contrast:**

Jansenism emphasized God's anger and judgment, while the Sacred Heart devotion highlights God's love and mercy. Jansenism led to a pessimistic view of humanity's ability to cooperate with grace, while the Sacred Heart devotion emphasizes God's invitation to union and participation in His love.

- **Historical Context:**

The rise of the Sacred Heart devotion coincided with the height of Jansenist influence in France. Pope Pius XI explicitly stated that the feast of the Sacred Heart was instituted to counter the "sad and gloomy severity of Jansenism". The devotion offered a comforting alternative to the fear and despair engendered by Jansenist theology.

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### The Essential Elements of Devotion to the Sacred Heart include:

- Worship of Jesus as the Sacred Heart.
- Belief in the merciful love of Jesus.
- Reparation for offenses against Jesus, particularly on First Friday.
- Special love and reverence for the Blessed Sacrament.