



March 23, 2021

To the Trustees and Directors of Education in the Catholic School Boards, and to all Catholic educational institutions, in the Archdiocese of Toronto:

“Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11: 28-29)

After a year of Covid-19, we are all heavy laden. The spectre of sickness and death wears us down, as does the devastating effect of pandemic restrictions. This is nowhere more evident than in schools. But quite apart from the pandemic, these are days of much suffering, with so much conflict in the world, and so much contention in society. Across the globe, refugees flee oppressive regimes, and the blood of martyrs rebukes us in our comfortable Christianity. In our own country, social trends antagonistic to the Gospel gather strength.

To move outward with compassionate love, we need first to go deeper in our life of faith, through prayer, through meditation on sacred Scripture, especially the Gospels, and through the sacraments. As the prophet Isaiah says: “with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” (Isaiah 12:3) To give us the guidance and strength required to fulfil our mission more effectively, we also need to rediscover a treasure, central to our life in Christ, that is hidden in plain sight in our Catholic spiritual heritage. It seems ever more clear to me that especially in these days we would all do well to meditate upon the symbol of the compassionate love of Christ: the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Even in our secular society, the heart is the common sign of love, as we see every Valentine’s Day, but for a Christian the Sacred Heart signifies the steady, reliable, faithful, life-giving love which we experience in Jesus as we encounter him both in the Gospels and in our life of faith; we are called to imitate that faithful love.

The traditional image of the Sacred Heart is surmounted by a cross, the primary symbol of Christian faith: it draws us to contemplate the generous and sacrificial love of Jesus, as he lays down his life for us on the cross. We are called to show that same generous and sacrificial love, as we take up our cross and follow him each day. The Sacred Heart is crowned by the Crown of Thorns, which reminds us of the cost of discipleship. It is surrounded by flames: our love for others, in imitation of Christ, must not flicker but burn brightly with light and warmth in a world so often dark and cold.

Sometimes, Jesus points to the Sacred Heart, inviting us to come to him when we labour and are heavy laden; sometimes the arms of Jesus reach outward, welcoming everyone, as he calls us to do. The Sacred Heart is a sign of the love of Jesus, which we are invited to imitate. More than ever before, our world now needs the love symbolized by the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

I am inviting all Catholics, in all our parishes, and in all the hospitals, schools, and institutions within the archdiocese, to focus on the significance of this sign of the sacrificial and compassionate love of Christ: the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In our families and in our parishes we all need to ponder the love of the Sacred Heart, and to live accordingly; on the Fourth Week of Lent I preached on this theme at the live-streamed Mass at the Cathedral, and will continue to do so in other contexts. Shortly before that I emphasized it at the Lenten retreat for the priests of the archdiocese, encouraging them to emphasize this sign of Christ’s love in their ministry.



I am also writing to you, who are responsible for the Catholic Schools in our archdiocese, because you are entrusted in a particular way with the sacred duty of caring for the young people of our community. Like us all, they deserve and they need life-giving spiritual nourishment, clear guidance in life, and the true compassionate love that Jesus teaches us in the Gospel, and models for us, and challenges us to imitate. The symbol of the Sacred Heart is the sign of that love in our Catholic Christian tradition.

This year the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is on Friday, June 11th, and I encourage all Catholics to prepare to celebrate it with renewed appreciation. In fact, each year the Church celebrates the whole month of June as the Month of the Sacred Heart. I am inviting everyone in the archdiocese to devote that month to meditating on the Sacred Heart, and to deepening our commitment to imitate the compassionate love of Jesus, a love that reaches out to the lonely, to the isolated, to the sick, and to all those who are rejected. Along with the cross, the symbol of the Sacred Heart is the Catholic Christian sign of that love.

And so I ask all Catholic schools to focus throughout June, the Month of the Sacred Heart, on this profound symbol of what our life in Christ is all about – of what Catholic education is all about.

As I announced in January at the meeting with the Chairs and Directors of Education, I will publish a pastoral letter to offer a more extended meditation on the insights of our Catholic tradition regarding this fundamental symbol of the compassionate love of Christ. More resources and suggestions for prayer, thought, and action will be forthcoming. But for now, I encourage all of us to reflect prayerfully upon the Sacred Heart, this sign of the love of Jesus, and to live accordingly.

Thank you for all that you continue to do to support and strengthen Catholic education. May God bless you always.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Thomas Card. Collins

Thomas Cardinal Collins
Archbishop of Toronto