

FOLLOW THE HEART OF GOD

BISHOP BRUCE LEWANDOWSKI'S CONVOCATION HOMILY

She's got a big heart. She's all heart. She wears her heart on her sleeve. Don't take it to heart. My heart is broken. My heart's not in it. My heart's in my mouth. Eat your heart out. Don't be so cold-hearted. You've got a heart of gold. We really need to have a heart-to-heart. Take heart. Follow your heart. Let's get to the heart of the matter...

The many expressions we use that refer to the heart can make us pause and reflect on the human heart and the meaning it carries. The human heart is overflowing with meaning.

Think of Mother Theresa Maxis' heart. Which of these phrases might describe her heart? She had a big heart -for the poor. In times of distress and upheaval -maybe she wore her heart on her sleeve. In the face of adversity, which she knew well, she may have pondered, how can people be so cold-hearted? I wonder if she ever had a heart-to-heart with Bishop Neumann; she must have and may be more than one.

Our readings today can offer a window into the heart of this holy woman.

Take a close look at the heart of Solomon – It's interesting to note that when Solomon asks for wisdom, the literal translation of the word he uses is heart, but not just any kind of heart, a listening, an understanding heart. He asks for wisdom and is given the gift of a listening heart. A wise heart is a listening heart. A heart that listens to God, understands God's ways, and is guided by God's goodness, beauty, and truth.

For ancient people like Solomon, there didn't exist a distinction between head and heart. Thinking and discerning and deciding were all processes and actions of the heart, the center of the human person.

We strike our heart at the "Confiteor." We say, "Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault." Did you ever think why? We should be knocking on our heads. I've done it myself, saying how could I be so dumb, so stupid? Why didn't someone stop me and save me from myself and my bad ideas? The heart is the center, the core, of who we are. It's where God becomes ours and where we become God's own, beloved and cherished.

Let's take this a bit further. A baby grows accustomed to the mother's rhythmic heartbeat in the womb. After birth, this familiar sound, especially during close contact, deeply soothes the child, lowers their stress levels, and eases them into peacefulness and calm. A baby recognizes its mother's heartbeat.

Studies show that when mothers and babies share loving looks, contented coos, or synchronized smiles, their heartbeats can coordinate to the millisecond. Their hearts beat together as one.

During prenatal exams, medical professionals must distinguish the mother's slower pulse from the baby's rapid heartbeat to ensure accurate fetal monitoring. Occasionally, monitors might pick up the mother's pulse as the baby's pulse. Their hearts beat in such a way that they resemble each other and are sometimes indistinguishable from each other.

Solomon asked for a heart that recognizes the beating heart of God, that syncs with the heart of God, that is so close to the heart of God that it can easily be mistaken for God's own heartbeat. Don't we all want a heart like that? Isn't that the very heart of Mother Theresa Maxis? So close to God that she recognized the beating heart of God. Her heart beat in unison with his and became indistinguishable from his.

A heart check – this year's convocation is just that. Sister, check your heart!

AFib, or atrial fibrillation, is the most common type of heart arrhythmia. It occurs when the upper chambers of the heart (the atria) experience chaotic electrical signals, causing them to beat rapidly and irregularly instead of pumping blood efficiently.

We can have a kind of "spiritual a-fib." Signs of "spiritual a-fib":

- The superficial pulse: Religious life becomes a mechanical routine without a deep, genuine internal life.

- A stagnant flow or clogged arteries: Divine love and compassion stop flowing outward to other people, and we think only of ourselves -my, me, and mine. It's called EGO. Edging God Out... It's all about me and no one else. Selfish, self-absorbed, self-centered.

- Loss of Vital Energy: Disconnection from our core values and practices can lead to spiritual fatigue and apathy, boredom, monotony, a stale and blah sort of existence.

- Divided Allegiance: The soul tries to serve two masters, creating internal friction. When the chambers of the heart start to work against each other, we can experience heart failure.

- Spiritual Arrhythmia: The heart skips beats, that is, in living the vows, prayer, devotion, moral consistency, and serving the mission.

Sister, How's your heart? How's the heart of the community? The Congregation? To follow the heart of the Gospel, we need to take the Gospel to heart. Maybe today at the table, sharing your heart skipped a beat. Maybe your heart was in your mouth. Maybe your heart stopped!

Is your heart beating...

- to the rhythm of Mother Teresa Maxis' heart?

- To the rhythm of the Congregation and its mission?

- to the rhythm of the heart of Holy Mother Church?

- in unison with the Immaculate Heart of Mary?

It's all the same really. Isn't it? Our hearts must beat in sync with the Eucharistic Heart of Christ. O God, give us listening hearts! You can't hear a heartbeat unless you get close, get quiet, and stay close and listen. Close to each other, close to the people of God, close to Theresa Maxis, close to Mary Immaculate, close to Christ...

Get close to the heart of Mother Theresa Maxis. What a wonderful and holy woman! I hope to meet her one day.

There's another heart-moment in the Liturgy. The preface dialogue that we are so familiar with should make us stop and reflect.

"The Lord be with."

"And with your spirit."

"Lift up your hearts." Stop there!

Aren't we saying, God, take my heart; remake, refashion, recreate my heart. Take my heart and do with it what you will, according to your plans and your designs.

The Gospel tells us of buried treasure... There is something odd, even strange about the parable. The man finds the treasure in the field. He hides it again and then goes and sells all he has and buys the field. Why didn't he just take it? Would you just take the treasure?

The treasure can't be stolen. Acquiring the treasure requires work and effort; it's not easy. Sisters, get close to God's poor, the immigrant whose hearts are racing with fear, struggling families, the elderly, sick and infirm, children, students, those in prison and those trapped in addiction... those who are out of work or out of hope, those who feel unloved or think themselves unlovable. Get close to them and listen to the beating of their hearts. Sister, let them steal your heart. Don't make them work for it! Give it freely to them. Sisters, the world needs your heart full of kindness and gentleness and compassion! Full of love!

Solomon asked for a listening and understanding heart. Today, what kind of heart are you asking for?

A heart anchored in Faith, not fear.

A heart for the vulnerable and poor.

A heart that is courageous.

A heart that is pure.

A heart that gives selflessly, that gives and gives and gives.

A heart of mercy.

A consoling heart.

A caring heart.

A heart full of love.

A heart that is... well, look for it... in the heart of God.

Where your treasure is, there your heart is. May Christ be the only treasure of our hearts. May we all find ourselves one day treasured in the heart of Christ.