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## **The Sacred Heart and the priesthood**

Bishop John T. Folda

Last month in all of our parishes we consecrated the Diocese of Fargo and all of its people to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in commemoration of our Blessed Mother's apparition at Fatima one hundred years ago. The month of May is widely observed as Mary's Month, a time for special devotion to our Blessed Mother.

But this month of June is traditionally dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, due to the celebration of the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart on the third Friday after Pentecost, which falls this year on June 23. This devotion to the Sacred Heart is a perfect corollary to our diocesan consecration, because whoever is one with the heart of Mary will also be one with the heart of Jesus, her Son.

The heart is a common symbol for love, or for the love we bear towards others. Likewise, the Sacred Heart devotion reminds us of the warmth and love of our Lord Jesus for all his people. As St. Margaret Mary Alacoque reveals to us, the heart of Jesus is burning for each one of us, warming our own hearts with the divine love of God for his children. The Sacred Heart is also a symbol of the mercy of Jesus toward all sinners, and his desire for their repentance and conversion.

This image of the Sacred Heart is especially appropriate now, as we celebrate the priesthood in the Diocese of Fargo. On June 3 I had the great joy of ordaining Father Scott Karnik, Father Paul Kuhn, and Father Jayson Miller to the priesthood, and from now on each of them will act *in persona Christi*, in the person of Christ, presenting to all people the love and mercy of God through their priestly ministry. They will preach the Gospel, celebrate the Mass, absolve sinners, and anoint the sick.

We also celebrate several ordination anniversaries this month, milestones for those priests who have given 25, 40, 50 or more years of service to God's people in the Diocese of Fargo. The merciful love of God that passes through the Heart of Jesus Christ explains the great mystery of the priesthood. The priesthood is given so that the gift and mystery of Christ's love can be perpetuated in the life of the Church. As St. John Vianney tells us, "The priesthood is the love of the heart of Christ."

But those words make it clear that the priest does not act on his own. The priest is anointed by the Holy Spirit just as Jesus was, so that he will be conformed in a special way to the person of Jesus, the great High Priest. The heart of the priest must be united in a unique way to the heart of Jesus, who called him to this beautiful but challenging life. He must be willing to die to himself so that he can live more fully in the One who called him. He must be a man for others with the heart of a shepherd, always ready to lay down his life for the sake of the sheep entrusted to his care.

And above all, the priests of our time must be men of prayer, abiding always in the heart of Jesus. But they also need the prayers of the faithful, whom they serve day after day. The priest depends on these prayers, and the faithful should desire in charity to support the priests who minister to them. Sharing in all the frailties of other men, priests face innumerable challenges and temptations. But, with the prayers of God's people to sustain them, they can remain the priests they were called to be, shepherds after the Heart of Christ.

Pope St. John Paul II established that on the solemnity of the Sacred Heart, the Church observes the World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of Priests. It would seem reasonable, however, that prayer for priests would be fitting at any time during this month of the Sacred Heart. I invite you to pray in a special way for our priests, perhaps by saying a rosary, making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, making a morning offering, fasting, or praying a special intention for the priests you know.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI published the following Prayer for Priests, which I offer to you and invite you to offer for the priests of our diocese:

Lord Jesus Christ,  
eternal High Priest, you offered yourself to the

Father on the altar of the Cross and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit gave your priestly people a share in your redeeming sacrifice.

Hear our prayer for the sanctification of our priests. Grant that all who are ordained to the ministerial Priesthood may be ever more conformed to you, the Divine Master. May they preach the Gospel with pure heart and clear conscience.

Let them be shepherds according to your own Heart, single-minded in service to you and to your Church and shining examples of a holy, simple, and joyful life.

Through the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, your Mother and ours, draw all priests and the flocks entrusted to their care to the fullness of eternal life where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit one God forever and ever. Amen.