

2 FROM THE PASTOR

Fr. Marie-Joseph Coudrin was ordained in the Irish Seminary in Paris, which was located in France because of the persecution of Catholics in Ireland. He was ordained in 1792 in the library, in secret, because the chapel had been taken over by the new revolutionary government to hold their meetings. The exploits of his first years of his ministry would later become famous with his many disguises necessary to carry out his ministry and avoid arrest.



Not long after ordination, he spent several months in a barn in prayer. During this time he had a vision of himself as a founder along with a foundress of a community of missionaries dedicated to praying before the Blessed Sacrament in reparation for the great offenses of sinners against the goodness and love of God. The Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary would give the world two great missionaries – Fr. Damien, the Apostle of Molokai, and Fr. Mateo, the Apostle of the Sacred Heart. Fr. Mateo was ordained in Chile, but spent time recuperating his health in France, and in the chapel of the visions of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque he felt a stirring in his own heart. Jesus had promised Sr. Margaret Mary that through devotion to His Sacred Heart, people would receive the grace they needed for their state of life. He would establish peace in homes, and comfort people in their affliction. He would be a refuge in life, and in death. He would bless people's undertakings. Sinners would find mercy, and the lukewarm would become zealous. Perfection would be possible! Fr. Mateo wanted to help families receive the fulfillment of these promises from Christ, and so he conceived a movement for the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the home, which Pope Pius X blessed in 1907. He took his message back to Chile, and then to Europe just as World War I was breaking out. In the face of such evil, he had a different battlefield in mind – the hearts and souls of believers, and a different way forward in the peace of Christ.

While his message gained immense following, the greatest response was in Spain. The King led a national consecration to the Sacred Heart, and a national shrine was built – a large statue of Sacred Heart of Jesus. At the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War two decades later, a “firing squad” shot the statue of Jesus in a symbolic act of execution, followed by its complete destruction with dynamite. Enmity to Christ, which is at the root of all sin, is unfortunately all too real - though rarely as visible. Our own sins, and those of others, should give us heartaches. As we hear from St. Paul this weekend, Jesus “died at the appointed time for the ungodly... God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” (Rom 5) The image of the Sacred Heart has never been that of a typical heart. Instead, it has a crown of thorns around it, and is pierced for our offenses. Jesus bore the weight of our sins in a very real way, for they are offenses against his love. Hence the need for reparation, for prayers of sorrow and works of true charity, for the ways in which we ourselves have wounded the tender heart of Christ, in which our complacency with sin has made us numb to it, as we become far too permissive and tolerant of evils large and small. The reparation we make is for our own sins, but also mindful of the sins of the world, as we offer ourselves, with him, in a sacrifice of love.

The national shrine in Spain would thankfully be rebuilt – even larger, with a future revival of faith. New beginnings are possible in the mercy and grace of God. The promises of Christ can be real, but only if we choose a different way. Monuments can be places of encounter, but they can also be memorials of the past. To have true impact, they must become a daily reality. Enthroning Christ in our hearts is essential - but we must fight to keep him on the throne, as with our countless choices we choose his reign. Enthroning Christ in our homes is beautiful, but we must choose each day to love God above all else and others before ourselves. May we find refuge, and life, in the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, as we see our own past sins for what they are, and by his greater mercy live the new life of the Resurrection in his glorious kingdom.

In Christ,
Fr. Matthew Oakland

