

'A sacred Valentine' - the significance of the Sacred Heart of Jesus



Photo by Tom McCarthy Jr., art by April Hornbeck / CR Staff

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When parishioners of St. Michael the Archangel in Fells Point were preparing to relocate to Sacred Heart of Jesus in Highlandtown three years ago to form a new bilingual faith community with the parishioners there, an archdiocesan leader suggested that the reconstituted parish take on a new name.

Redemptorist Father Robert Wojtek, former pastor of St. Michael and current pastor of the new Sacred Heart of Jesus-Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, remembered that almost everyone, even the faithful at St. Michael who were losing their church building, fervently opposed the idea.

The passionate support for retaining Sacred Heart's name is evidence of the strong, visceral commitment Catholics have to the Sacred Heart of Jesus devotion, Father Wojtek said.

"The heart is the center of love and the center of life," he said. "The Sacred Heart is a heart full of love for us, and that's the attraction. It's like a sacred Valentine."

Devotion to the Sacred Heart is a centuries-old tradition in the Catholic Church that focuses on Christ's physical heart as a symbol of his love for humanity. During apparitions to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in the late 17th century, Christ is believed to have encouraged the devotion. St. John Eudes, another French saint of the 17th century, was also a well-known apostle of the Sacred Heart.

As part of devotion to the Sacred Heart, many Catholics receive holy Communion on nine consecutive first Fridays of the month. Some say special prayers to consecrate themselves to the Sacred Heart. Throughout June, a month traditionally devoted to the Sacred Heart, believers meditate on Christ's love. The Feast of the Sacred Heart is celebrated 19 days after Pentecost on a Friday, with this year's feast falling on June 27.

"Devotion to the Sacred Heart is something you can wrap your senses around," Father Wojtek said. "It's something that's physical, and people know the importance

of the heart in the body.”

In his reflections on the Sacred Heart, Pope Francis has emphasized the heart of Christ as the “ultimate symbol of God’s mercy.”

“The Lord is always watching us with mercy,” Pope Francis said last year. “Let us be not afraid to approach him. He has a merciful heart. If we show our inner wounds, our sins, he always forgives us. He is pure mercy.”

Honor the Sacred Heart

Sacred Heart of Jesus in Highlandtown will offer a devotional service in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus every Wednesday of June beginning at 7 p.m. The English service will include recitation of prayers in honor of the Sacred Heart, a homily and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

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