

Reflection on the Consecration to the Sacred Heart

by Archbishop Alexander K. Sample, Chairman of the Committee for Religious Liberty

On November 11, the bishops of the United States voted to consecrate this nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The consecration will take place in 2026 to celebrate America's semiquincentennial, that is, the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. What does this mean? Why consecrate the nation to the Sacred Heart?

Devotion to the Sacred Heart has developed over the centuries following the experiences of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque and the apparitions she witnessed in the seventeenth century. Popes have lauded the practice of consecration of the self, home, and even whole nations to the Sacred Heart.¹ In his encyclical instituting the Solemnity of Christ the King, Pope Pius XI, drawing on the teaching of Pope Leo XIII,² commended the "pious custom" of consecrating the nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a way to recognize the kingship of Christ.³ By celebrating this important national anniversary with this devotion, we have the opportunity to encourage all Catholics to honor our Lord and to "infuse the spirit of the Gospel into various communities and departments of life."⁴

With his encyclical, *Dilexit Nos*, Pope Francis brought devotion to the Sacred Heart to the forefront of our contemporary Catholic life and culture. He noted: "In contemplating the pierced heart of the Lord, who 'took our infirmities and bore our diseases,' we too are inspired to be more attentive to the sufferings and needs of others and confirmed in our efforts to share in his work of liberation as instruments for the spread of his love. As we meditate on Christ's self-offering for the sake of all, we are naturally led to ask why we too should not be ready to give our lives for others."⁵ In *Dilexi Te*, Pope Leo invited us to contemplate Christ's love, which moves us out on our mission to attend to our sisters and brothers suffering in the world today, particularly in our care for poor and vulnerable people. As we reflect with gratitude on the blessings God has bestowed on our country, our devotion to the Sacred Heart demands that we consider how we might foster truth, justice, and charity in American life. We are called to bring our faith into the actions we take and the lives we lead in our communities. We celebrate the ways the Church has contributed to a more just world, and we invite all in our society to see the face of Christ reflected in each sister and brother. We welcome God's "kingdom of justice, fraternity and solidarity,"⁶ remembering that "God has a special place in his heart for those who are discriminated against and oppressed, and he asks us, his Church, to make a decisive and radical choice in favor of the weakest."⁷ This anniversary and consecration will be a great opportunity to promote the beautiful devotion to the Sacred Heart and to encourage the laity to offer their lives in service to God and their country.

References to footnotes can be viewed on the US Catholic Conference of Bishops website.

<https://www.usccb.org/reflection-consecration-sacred-heart>