

Death of the first Superior General and Founder: August 12

Venerable Fr. Léon Jean du Cœur de Jésus DEHON (March 14, 1843 – August 12, 1925)

Biographical profile



Father Leo John of the Heart of Jesus Dehon. Founder and first Superior General (June 28, 1878 - August 12, 1925). He was born on March 14, 1843 in La Capelle (France). He was ordained in Rome on December 19, 1868. He wrote the Constitutions on July 31, 1877 and made his first profession on June 28, 1878, the founding date of the Institute. He died in Brussels on August 12, 1925 and was buried in the church he founded, San Martino in San Quentin (France).

Circular Letter of Bishop Joseph Laurent PHILIPPE: On the Death of Fr. Leo Dehon: 23.08.1925

Supernatural Sources

Let us consider the supernatural sources where this energetic sense of duty and this industrious finesse of heart [Fr. Dehon] were nurtured. It seems to me the spiritual doctrine and consequently the foundation of the interior life of our *Très Bon Père* can easily be reduced to a life of union with Our Lord.

The illness of our saintly Founder and more particularly the endless sleepless nights were but one continual prayer. This prayer became more ardent and more suppliant as the Holy Eucharist was brought early in the morning to the venerable sick man. On the first days of his illness, it was a great sacrifice for him not to be able to receive holy communion, so much so that on the first Friday he could stand it no longer and asked with insistence to communicate, depriving himself of all liquid until he had received the sacred host.

His favorite words which he repeated with his customary vivacity were: "Jesus is all, the friend; bring me my Jesus". These exclamations were but the echo of his soul's vivid desire to be united with the Master; thus his nights became a continual spiritual communion, an uninterrupted preparation for the reception of the Divine Guest. Near his bed, he had a little postcard placed there representing the well-known picture by Ary Scheffer: St. John resting on the bosom of Jesus. Pointing to this picture he used to say to his visitors: "Behold my all, my life, my death, and my eternity". These sentiments which never left the venerated sick man, are they not both the proof and the manifestation of a profound and fervent interior life?

The constant disposition of the Heart of Jesus was to do the will of His Father: to accept completely the will of God was also the intimate disposition which dominated the soul of our Reverend Father General.

Celebrations of the Founder

Lord Jesus,
you opened your heart to our Founder,
Leo John Dehon,
and he responded in love.
He offered his life to you:
working to restore a broken world,
proclaiming your abundant love,
and founding a congregation
to live a life of love and reparation in the world.

Lord,
inspired by our Founder's example,
we offer you our community,
our ministry,
and ourselves.
May we be faithful in our vocation
to work for the building of your reign
in human hearts
and in society.

Amen.

My Spiritual Testament to My Religious (Saint Quintin, 1914). SPIRITUAL DIRECTORY 293-298 [en] (DSP 1936, 474-482).

My Dearest Children:

I leave you the most wonderful of treasures, the Heart of Jesus. It belongs to all, but It has special affection for priests who are consecrated to Him and who are entirely devoted to His worship, to His love, to the reparation He has demanded, provided they be faithful to this beautiful vocation.

Our Lord loved all His Apostles, but did He not love with a special tenderness the Apostle John, to whom He bequeathed His Mother and His Divine Heart?

It is this idea that the beautiful decree of Leo XIII on the twenty-fifth of February, 1888, expressed: "This Institution will be like a bouquet of flowers for the Heart of Jesus, if its members are united and entirely devoted to the Sacred Heart, and if they establish the reign of His love in themselves and among the people whom they will evangelize".

In interpreting the word of David, we can say: "The Heart of Jesus is my portion. How beautiful is my share of the common heritage!" You understand that such a beautiful vocation requires great fervor and generosity.

We should never lose sight of our end and of our mission in the Church, as they are set forth in the first two chapters of our Constitutions. We must prepare for a tender love of the Sacred Heart by detachment from creatures, and by victory over our passions. This is reparation with all its practices: Masses and Communions of reparation, the Act of Reparation, the daily Adoration in reparation for sin, the Holy Hour, and mortifications which do not injure our health and which obedience will regulate. This is abandonment of ourselves in the spirit of victim to the Sacred Heart, to bear with patience, even with joy, the crosses which Divine Providence shall send us.

This vocation demands the practice of the interior life and union with Our Lord; moreover, we ought to reach out for all the means necessary to attain this state of soul, and to remain firmly fixed therein.

The interior life is not preserved without great regularity, accompanied by the practice of religious silence. To be grounded in these requisites, you will give a good half hour each day to the morning meditation, apart from vocal prayers, and a half hour to the 'adoration of reparation. You will do your spiritual reading each day, devoting a part of the time to the reading of Holy Scripture, and part of the time to an ascetical book or to a life of some saint. You will choose the life of saints who can be called Saints of the Sacred Heart, those who have best known and practiced this adorable devotion.

In as much as I can, I confide you to the Heart of Jesus. I recommend you to His mercy. I address to Him this prayer which He addressed to His Father on behalf of His disciples: "My Father, keep those whom Thou hast given Me."

I entrust you in a like manner to our heavenly Mother. Our Lord will indeed wish to say to her concerning you, what He said to her of St. John on Calvary: "Behold your children."

Let us have a special love for the well- beloved of Jesus: Mary and Joseph, the three great archangels, St. John the Baptist, St. Peter, St. John, St. Mary Magdalene, and all the Saints of the Sacred Heart.

To say a word to you about myself, I ask your pardon for having edified you so little. I do not labor under any illusion. I place myself beneath all people because of the abuse I have made of the great graces I have received. It is to show forth the depths of His mercy that Our Lord has upheld my mission in spite of my unworthiness. I hope, nevertheless, for salvation, because the mercy of Our Lord will not be inconsistent; but I shall have to perform a great expiation, and I ardently solicit your prayers for the repose of my soul.

Need I tell you, that if Our Lord sees fit to admit me into His presence, I shall pray for you all and for the work which is so dear to the Sacred Heart?

Pardon me for the pains I have caused you, and the bad example of lukewarmness I have given you.

Like St. John, my master and model, I say to all of you: "Love one another as Jesus Christ has loved you." I beg of you, by all my affection for you and by all that you have manifested for me, that you act in such a manner that holy charity may ever reign amongst you. Never offer a word of criticism or of bitterness against another among you. Have a great respect for those who hold the place of God for you. Obedience, regularity, and poverty are the safeguards of a Congregation.

You are aware that families of religious priests have usually been aided in their initial undertaking by consecrated virgins who have prayed for their cause, as the Holy Virgin Mary did for St. John. This help has not been wanting for you. Two Communities in particular have contributed the aid of their prayers and their sacrifices. We owe a lasting gratitude to the Sister Servants of the Heart of Jesus of Saint-Quentin. I could not begin to tell you all they have done for us, even to offering their life for the success of our work. We have no canonical affiliation whatsoever with them; the Holy See no longer authorizes such union of communities as was the common practice of the ancient Orders. But that does not prevent a union of prayer and of sacrifices — Never forget that.

While I was establishing the foundation at Saint-Quentin, with the help of these Sisters, the Sister Victims of Namur were preparing some holy priests who came to associate themselves with us, such as Rev. Fr. Andre, of holy memory, and Fr. Charcosset, my faithful assistant. You will remember them, too.

My last word will be again to recommend to you daily adoration, the official adoration of reparation, in the name of the Holy Church, to console Our Lord and to hasten the reign of the Sacred Heart in souls and among nations.

Again I offer and consecrate my life and my death to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for love of Him, and for all His intentions. All for Thy love, O Heart of Jesus!

Given at Saint-Quentin, during the sad days of the war in 1914.

John of the Heart of Jesus.

PACT OF LOVE (Fr. Léon Dehon)

My Jesus,
before you and your heavenly Father,
in the presence of Mary Immaculate, my mother,
and of St. Joseph, my protector,
I make the vow of placing myself out of pure love
at the disposal of your Sacred Heart,
and of devoting my life and energy
to the Oblates of your Heart.
I accept in advance
all the trials and sacrifices
which it will please you to ask of me.
I vow that pure love for Jesus and his Sacred Heart
shall be the intention for all my actions.
And I beg you to touch my heart
by inflaming it with your love,
so that I may have the intention
and desire of loving you.
Through your grace
let me again feel the happiness
of having all the affections of my heart
centered on you alone.

Daily Renewal

My Jesus, I lovingly renew the pact of love that I made with you.
Give me the grace to be faithful to it.