**Personal Reflection in Honor of the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus**

**(Homily by Fr. Leo F. Arnone, Pastor of St. Francis Xavier Parish & St. Aloysius Parish, Cresson, PA)**

I’ve been to Mexico, just across the border, where I encountered Montezuma’s revenge. I’ve toured French Quebec, Canada, where I saw the church where Celine Dion was married. I did two tours of Italy, visiting several major cities (Rome and Assisi were my favorites). I’ve toured Ireland, visiting the shrine of Our Lady of Knock and a few of their pubs. I’ve sailed on the USS Makin Island around the Horn of Africa for four months chasing Somali pirates, lived nine weeks on the Island country of Bahrain where I enjoyed 16 “Holy Hilo” flights to eight different ships, and a full year in Djibouti (Don’t go there!). But this past year I got to fulfill my favorite bucket-list tour, and that was to join the Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus on an action packed, every day an awesome day, tour of Poland. What an honor to join in their major celebration of their founding 125 years ago.

I was and still am deeply impressed with Poland’s history, their natural beauty, and the depth of their spirituality. I can assure you that at least a full quarter of our time in Poland was on our knees and in prayer in the various churches, chapels and shrines we visited. I am particularly thankful, Mother Klara, for arranging a visit to the shrines of St. Faustina and Pope St. John Paul II. And while I thought it was awesome to visit the places of your founders, St. Joseph Sabastian Palczar and Bl. Mother Klara Szczesna, I can only imagine how you all felt to physically connect with your Family Founders. I felt both happy and proud for you in those moments, and you really do have good cause to be both happy and proud of your spiritual roots.

While I’m not a subject matter expert on your history, we both have shared something in common long before we met and got to know each other, that is, our mutual love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I shared with some of you my own connection to the Sacred Heart: my parents, long before I was born – I’m number 7 of 9 – dedicated our family to the Sacred Heart. (Family dedication above the coffee pot.) The way we were raised, I presumed that this devotion was a standard part of Catholicism – and what a shock to my system to discover otherwise. A Sacred Heart novena helped me make the decision to become a Priest and a Sacred Heart novena helped me make the decision to enter the Navy Chaplain Corps. And I credit Sacred Heart formation for making me well disposed to the Divine Mercy devotion. From my perspective the two devotions go hand-in-hand.

So what I very pleasant surprise it was when I came to Cresson and discovered that my secretary was a Sacred Heart Sister and that your Mother House was already part of my parish. I did not know that before coming here – they never tell us anything! However, I later discovered that my secretary had already checked my out via Google. I first appeared in civilian clothes but she already knew what I looked like. From that point on, I’ve been grateful for your Order’s service to my parish and my school. In front of the scenes and behind the scenes your Order has provided an invaluable service for the spiritual growth of our students, families, the local community and this parish. I am personally grateful for John Paul II Manor for taking my mother in when no one else would – I could not ask for a better and more loving environment in which to end her days. (A special word of gratitude to Mariam Stoltz for her added support.) I knew when I left for Djibouti that she would not survive until I got back, but I was able to go knowing that she was in your care. For her own life dedicated to the Sacred Heart, the Sacred Heart of Jesus Himself arranged for His Sister Servants to care for her until it was time for her to go home. I will love you forever for that!

So that is just one person’s testimony on your behalf. I’ve no doubt that over the past 60 years here in America your Order has touched countless others in front of the scenes and more likely behind the scenes in the loving service you extend into the world. Each of you, under the charism of your Order, are helping to extend the Kingdom of God here on earth. May our good and loving God continue to bless you collectively and individually. May the sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus live long and prosper until the Second Coming of Christ. And on that day may you hear Jesus say: “Well done my good and faithful Sister Servants!”