



SACRED HEART NOVENA 2026

4th - 12th June 2026

'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.'

Matthew 11: 28 - 29



COME TO ME, FOR I AM GENTLE AND HUMBLE IN HEART

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Come to Me. These words of Jesus are among the most tender in all of the Gospels. They are not a command but an invitation — offered freely, offered personally, offered to each one of us.

To set aside time each day for prayer is to say yes to that invitation. It is a simple act, yet a profound one. In the busyness of our lives — with all their demands, their joys, and their anxieties — to pause and turn our hearts toward Jesus is itself a form of love.

The devotion to the Sacred Heart has always reminded us that at the very centre of our faith is a relationship — with the One who loves us with a human heart, who knows our frailty and desires our flourishing.

Over these nine days, I ask that we pray in a particular way for the people of our Diocese of Down and Connor. May each person come to know, in whatever season of life they find themselves, the love of Christ and the great and generous plans that God holds for their lives.

I know that many of us carry significant burdens. Family concerns, health worries, grief, uncertainty — these are the daily companions of so many people in our communities. And in our world today, the shadow of conflict stretches far and wide, bringing fear and sorrow as we care deeply for all of humanity. None of this is lost on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He asks that we bring all our labours and burdens to him.

Let us bring all of it — every burden, every anxiety, every grief — to the Sacred Heart over these nine days. He who invites us to come to him is the same One who promises that we will find rest for our souls.

I pray this novena may be a time of true encounter for each of us.

I gCroí Íosa

+Alan McGuckian SJ.

+Alan McGuckian SJ
Bishop of Down and Connor



The Sign of the Cross.

In ainm an Athar agus an Mhic agus an Spioraid Naoimh. Amen

'I believe in God. I hope in God. I love God.
'I am sorry for having offended God.'
'Sacred Heart of Jesus, I believe in your love for me.'
'Sacred Heart of Jesus, I believe you love me now.'
'Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in Thee.'



NOVENA PRAYER

Jesus, you have said:

“Truly I say to you, ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you.”

Pray the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.

○ most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in you.

Jesus, you have said:

“Truly I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.”

Behold, in your name, I ask the Father for the grace of my request.

(Name intention)

Pray the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.

○ most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in you

Jesus, you have said:

“Truly I say to you, heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

Pray the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.

○ most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in you.

○ Sacred Heart of Jesus, for whom it is impossible not to have compassion on the afflicted, have mercy on us poor sinners and grant us the grace which we ask of you, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, your tender Mother and ours.



PRAYER TO OUR LADY

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
hail our life, our sweetness and our hope.

To you do we cry,

poor banished children of Eve.

To you do we send up our sighs,
mourning and weeping in this valley of tears

Turn then, most gracious advocate,

your eyes of mercy toward us,

and after this, our exile,

show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

Pray for us Oh Holy Mother of God

that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Amen

The Sign of the Cross.

In ainm an Athar agus an Mhic agus an Spioraid Naoimh. Amen.





MATTHEW 12:28-34

'You are not far from the kingdom of God'

One of the scribes came up to Jesus and put a question to him, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?' Jesus replied, 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.'

The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true: that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice.' Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.'

DAY 1 – REFLECTION



I am invited, first, to love God — with all I have and all I am. Not with what is left over after the busyness of the day, but with my whole heart, my thinking and my doing. And the remarkable thing is that I do not begin this love myself. I love because God has first loved me. Every movement of my heart toward God is already a response to a love that found me first.

Woven into the second commandment is something easily missed — the call to love myself. God loves me as I am, with all my shadows and contradictions. To receive that love, fully and honestly, is one of the most courageous things I can do. I love myself because God wants me to.

And then I love my 'neighbour'. They are the people God has placed right in front of me every day. Some of them are easy to love; others are not. But Jesus makes no distinction. To love my neighbour is not simply a good deed — it is an act of faith, a living sign that I have truly received the love of the Sacred Heart. That love does not run dry. The closer I remain to His Heart the more I have to give.

Over these nine days, I am offered a beautiful invitation — to fall more deeply in love with God, to be gentle and compassionate with myself as God is with me, and to open my eyes to those whom he has placed in my daily life.



PSALM 118(119): 157, 160-161, 165-166, 168

The lovers of your law have great peace

The lovers of your law have great peace

Though my foes and oppressors are countless
I have not swerved from your will.
Your word is founded on truth,
your decrees are eternal.

The lovers of your law have great peace

Though princes oppress me without cause
I stand in awe of your word.
The lovers of your law have great peace;
they never stumble.

The lovers of your law have great peace

I await your saving help, O Lord,
I fulfil your commands.
I obey your precepts and your will;
all that I do is before you.

DAY 2 – REFLECTION



"The lovers of your law have great peace; they never stumble."

(Psalm 119)

In the middle of this imperfect and flawed world, the Sacred Heart invites me to experience peace. This peace comes from love, a love that is guided by God's Word, his teaching and his law — written not in stone but on my heart.

There are days when life feels like opposition — pressures without and doubts within, a sense of being pulled in too many directions. The Psalmist knew this too. Yet in the midst of it, he found something solid to stand on. Not his own strength or certainty, but the word of God. Your word is founded on truth; your decrees are eternal. What the world offers shifts and changes. What God offers does not.

The teaching of the Church, rooted in that same word, is not a burden placed upon me. It is a path laid out with love — a gentle and loving guide that shows me how to live well, how to love truly, and how to find my way back when I have wandered. When I walk that path with an open heart, I discover what the Psalmist promises: great peace. Not the absence of difficulty, but a deep, quiet stillness that holds me even in the hard moments.

I await your saving help, O Lord. I do not walk this path alone. The Sacred Heart walks with me — and in that company, I need not stumble.



MARK 12:38-44

This poor widow has put in more than all

In his teaching Jesus said, 'Beware of the scribes who like to walk about in long robes, to be greeted obsequiously in the market squares, to take the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets; these are the men who swallow the property of widows, while making a show of lengthy prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive.'

He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the treasury, and many of the rich put in a great deal. A poor widow came and put in two small coins, the equivalent of a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'I tell you solemnly, this poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury; for they have all put in money they had over, but she from the little she had has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on.'



DAY 3 – REFLECTION



Have you ever sat and watched the world go by, simply observing people as they go about their day? In this Gospel Jesus sits down and watches. Not with judgment, not with indifference, but with the full attention of a heart that loves. While others see a widow with next to nothing, Jesus sees everything; her courage, her trust, her wholehearted gift. This is the gaze of the Sacred Heart.

Saint Ignatius, in the Spiritual Exercises, invites us into this same quality of seeing; to look at ourselves and our world through God's eyes, with love, compassion and understanding. It is not the gaze of a judge tallying failures. It is the gaze of one who sees everything and loves us still.

So today I am invited to ask:

How does God look upon me and the actions of my day?

When he watches, what does he see?

Perhaps moments of quiet generosity, of patience, of kindness offered without recognition— the hidden moments of love and faithfulness that only God sees. And where I have fallen short, his gaze does not condemn me. It simply invites me to try again - not out of guilt, but out of love.

The Sacred Heart looks upon me with tenderness. To rest in that gaze, and to let it gently shape my choices, is itself an act of prayer.

DAY 4 – SUNDAY 7TH JUNE

FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI



JOHN 6:51-58

My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink

Jesus said to the crowd:

'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

Then the Jews started arguing with one another: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' they said. Jesus replied:

'I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me. This is the bread come down from heaven; not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.'



DAY 4 – REFLECTION



Every time I gather with the Church for the Eucharist, I am present to a miracle. Not a distant, historical wonder, but something alive and real — Christ himself, fulfilling the promise he made: the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world. What happens on the altar is beyond what words can fully hold. And yet, it is offered to me, every time I come.

Saint Carlo Acutis, a young man of our own times, understood this with great clarity. He dedicated his short life to researching and archiving Eucharistic miracles from around the world — moments where the presence of Christ in the Eucharist became visible in extraordinary ways. What moved him deeply was the discovery that in many of these miracles, scientists had found the host to contain living heart tissue. The Heart of Jesus — the very heart whose love I contemplate in this novena — present in the Blessed Sacrament.

Jesus invites me to draw life from him, just as he draws life from the Father. That life is offered to me most fully in the Mass, in receiving communion, and in the quiet moments I spend in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Time spent in his presence is never wasted. It strengthens me, steadies me, and shapes me — slowly, gently — into someone more capable of loving as he loves.

The living bread has come down from heaven. I am invited, today and every day, to come and be fed.

***"People who place themselves in front of the sun get a tan;
people who place themselves in front of the Eucharist become Saints."***

Saint Carlo Acutis



PSALM 120 (121)

*Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth*

I lift up my eyes to the mountains;
from where shall come my help?
My help shall come from the Lord
who made heaven and earth.

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

May he never allow you to stumble!
Let him sleep not, your guard.
No, he sleeps not nor slumbers,
Israel's guard.

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The Lord is your guard and your shade;
at your right side he stands.
By day the sun shall not smite you
nor the moon in the night.

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The Lord will guard you from evil,
he will guard your soul.
The Lord will guard your going and coming
both now and for ever.

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

DAY 5 – REFLECTION



The Psalmist lifts his eyes to the mountains and asks the question that every honest heart eventually asks — where will my help come from? Navigating life is hard. The world around me is noisy, demanding, and full of competing voices. It pulls at my attention, my energy, my desires. And if I am honest, it pulls at my heart too.

To keep a pure heart, a heart steadfast in its love for God, is one of the great struggles of the Christian life. I know how quickly my heart can be drawn away - by anxiety, by distraction, by the slow accumulation of compromises that seem small in the moment. The wellsprings of my life flow from my heart, and I cannot always trust myself to guard it well.

But the Psalm reminds me that I am not left to do this alone. The Lord is my guard. He does not slumber or sleep. He stands at my right side, he is present in the ordinary moments of my day, watching over my coming and my going.

Today I am invited to ask the Lord for his protection and to call upon his name in my times of weakness and need: *Jesus, I trust in you.*



MARK 10:17-30

My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink

Jesus was setting out on a journey when a man ran up, knelt before him and put this question to him, 'Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments...' And he said to him, 'Master, I have kept all these from my earliest days.' Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him, and he said, 'There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.



Jesus looked round and said to his disciples, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!... For men it is impossible, but not for God: because everything is possible for God.'

DAY 6 – REFLECTION



A man runs up to Jesus, full of energy, seeking eternal life. And Jesus looks steadily at him and loves him. The man is seeking eternal life. Jesus is loving him. What could go wrong here?

Jesus, in his love, does not want to leave the man where he is. Precisely because Jesus loves him, he names the thing that stands between this man and the fullness of life he is seeking. 'There is one thing you lack.' Not many things. One. But it is the one thing the man cannot bring himself to release. His face falls. He walks away sad. He came running; he leaves heavy.

What might be holding us back from being close to God? It is a question worth sitting with honestly, because the answer is rarely what we expect. It is seldom the dramatic sin or the obvious failing. More often it is something we have quietly arranged our lives around — a comfort, a status, a need for control.

Today in my prayer I could ask for two things. Firstly, I pray for an appreciation of my need for God and for communion with him. Secondly, I ask for wisdom to recognise what is the 'one thing' that I cling to and refuse to let go even when it stands in the way of my following Jesus.

Ask today for the intercession of St Margaret Mary Alacoque who desired to be united always to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Prayer of St Margaret Mary to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Lord Jesus, let my heart never rest until it finds You, who are its centre, its love, and its happiness. By the wound in Your heart pardon the sins that I have committed whether out of malice or out of evil desires. Place my weak heart in your own divine heart, continually under your protection and guidance, so that I may persevere in doing good and in fleeing evil until my last breath. Amen.



MATTHEW 5:17-19

I have come not to abolish but to complete

Jesus said to his disciples:

'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved.

Therefore, the man who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but the man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.'



DAY 7 – REFLECTION



There is a word at the heart of this passage that deserves our full attention: complete. Jesus does not come to dismantle what has gone before. Jesus is the completion of the Law. Every commandment, every stroke of the ancient covenant was a preparation for this: a heart that loves without limit, that holds nothing back. When we look at the Sacred Heart — opened, pierced, burning — we are seeing what perfect obedience to love looks like when it is lived in a human body.

It is tempting, in every generation, to reduce faith to what is manageable — to keep the parts that suit us and quietly set aside those that cost us more than we wish to give. Jesus names this tendency directly. *Not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear.* And yet he is not calling us to a joyless, fearful religion. The Law he speaks of completing is not a burden designed to crush us. It is a path designed to lead us home.

There is a profound beauty in a life shaped by the teachings of the Church — a life with a pattern to it, a direction, a horizon. The Church's wisdom, carried across centuries and tested in countless human lives, is not an obstacle to joy but its architecture. To live within that wisdom is to find, gradually and often surprisingly, that we are becoming more fully ourselves — more free, more loving, more alive.

I ask today for the graces I need to follow Jesus completely allowing me to be considered *great in the kingdom of heaven.*



MATTHEW 5:20-26

Anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it

Jesus said to his disciples: 'If your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

'You have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must not kill; and if anyone does kill, he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you: anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court; if a man calls his brother "Fool" he will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and if a man calls him "Renegade" he will answer for it in hell fire. So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.'



DAY 8 – REFLECTION



We all know what it is to carry something. A conversation that did not go well. A relationship that has quietly cooled. A word spoken in hurt or haste that we have never quite found our way back from. Jesus, in this passage, looks straight at that experience and gently calls us toward something better.

He asks us to look not just at what we have done, but at what we have allowed to grow in our hearts — the resentment we have nursed, the grudge we have held onto, the person we have written off. And then he says something that stops us in our tracks. If you are on your way to worship and you remember that someone has something against you — stop. Go and be reconciled first. Then come back.

For Jesus, love of God and love of neighbour are never separate. The Sacred Heart that poured itself out to reconcile us to the Father longs to see that same spirit of reconciliation alive in us — in our homes, our families, our parishes, our places of work.

Tomorrow, we celebrate the Feast of the Sacred Heart. What a gift it would be to come to that celebration with a lighter heart. The mercy of Jesus is not a distant thing — it is close, personal, and always available to us.

If you are able, consider going to the Sacrament of Reconciliation before the Feast. There is nothing quite like hearing those words of absolution spoken over you — the assurance that you are forgiven, that the slate is clean, that you are free. But if that is not possible, make a heartfelt Act of Sorrow. Bring to Jesus honestly whatever you are carrying — the anger, the hurt, the broken relationship — and place it in his hands.

DAY 9 – FRIDAY 12TH JUNE

FEAST OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS



MATTHEW 11:25-30

Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened

Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'



DAY 9 REFLECTION



On this great feast of the Sacred Heart, Jesus gives a direct invitation, addressed to each of us by name: Come to me.

Notice who Jesus is calling. Not the strong or the 'sorted'. Not those who have their faith perfectly ordered or their lives neatly together. He calls the labouring and the overburdened — which is to say, most of us, most of the time. Whatever I have been carrying through these nine days, whatever is weighing on me as I reach the end of this novena, this invitation is for me.

And then Jesus does something remarkable. He describes his own heart. In all the Gospels, this is the only moment where he tells us directly what he is like on the inside: 'I am gentle and humble in heart.' Not powerful. Not demanding. Gentle. The heart we have been contemplating throughout this novena — burning with love, crowned with thorns, opened wide — is, at its deepest, a gentle heart. A heart that does not overwhelm or intimidate but draws us in and gives us rest.

Jesus also tells us that the things of God are not reserved for the learned and the clever. They are revealed to those who come like children — open, trusting, dependent. This novena has been an invitation into that simplicity. To simply come to Jesus. To receive his love.

As this novena draws to a close, I allow the gentle words of Jesus' invitation 'Come to me' to echo in my own heart. I recognise that each day Jesus is inviting me to bring my burdens to him, to be close to him and to follow him. In the gentle, humble, heart of Jesus I will find rest for my soul.

○ most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in you.



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