

Heart Language

Yesterday, we received a letter which certainly warmed *my* heart. It was a letter that spoke to the heart of who we are when at our best, about core values. A letter which described some of our young men who were, as we say, large-hearted. It came from Joey's, from the Director of AFL at St Joseph's. There, they are very much beginners in AFL. Their Open team were inexperienced and unsure. To compete against 'View, with so many years and successes behind us, was to be quite daunting. We could have easily steam-rolled them. But we didn't. Our coach and players discerned the real spirit of the game. What would we have gained from so easy a victory? What would the opposing team have learned? So the heart ruled. We shared players. And we shared our *best* players. We even shared our captain, Ed Swan. We switched jumpers. In the last quarter, we even shared our entire mid-field. Generous hearts, indeed. In Australia, we call it giving someone a fair go. It is having a heart for the battler.

The Joey's Director wrote, "Our players left the ground feeling positive about the experience and enriched by the gesture and sportsmanship." Of our boys he remarked, "They not only did this without coaxing, but worked really hard and played for us with passion and desire. I cannot speak highly enough of the boys that came over." Whose heart would not have been cheered by that?

I was so proud to read that letter. Yes, I know there are some who might say, "That's not what the game is about. We're there to win, and if they can't match us, bad luck them." That is head logic, and people are entitled to think that way. But it is not heart logic. When our Open team left the field, I bet none of them said, "That was a wasted opportunity," or "We missed out on dealing Joey's a humiliating loss." No. I suspect they came off feeling good about themselves. A heartfelt satisfaction. They would have perhaps understood what the great mathematician and philosopher, Blaise Pascal, meant when he once said, "The heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing of." The discerning heart always leads to choices which are life-giving and not self-serving.

Way back in time, as our first reading at Mass reminds us, the Jewish Bible records God promising to replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh – provided, of course, we allow God's Spirit to work in us. A heart of stone is cold and unresponsive. But a heart of flesh beats with life and love. It *gives* life and love.

'Heart' is a primordial word, a universal symbol. It suggests the place where emotion and spirit and conscience and will all converge in the human self. Not surprisingly, Jesus takes it as a metaphor to describe his unconditional love for us. God's unconditional love. Unconditional means we don't merit such love. We don't earn it. We can't lose it. It just is. God just loves. God *is* love. God's love comes with no strings attached. It is constant and unending. Human love, we know, can readily be lost when a relationship fails, when there is betrayal, or deceit, or hurt. But not God's love. In Jesus, it is poured out for us, even to the point of death. On the cross, it is called "the love of the pierced heart".

There is not much purpose celebrating this Feast of the Sacred Heart unless something touches our hearts, too. It has to be more than a pious image to hang on a wall or craft in a stained-glass window. It is a call to find our own hearts. To listen to them. To be fired up by them. To be loving through them.

In the Gospel, Jesus gives us a very simple anatomy lesson to find our hearts: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Our treasure lies both outside us and within us. As you move through your years at Riverview and into your life beyond, I hope you gain a freedom to sift through all those things, all those apparent 'treasures', which begin to capture your attention. I hope you gain a discerning heart for that. Like those AFL players last Saturday – choosing something greater than an empty victory, settling on a real treasure. There will be all sorts of attractions and allurements ahead of you. Passions, prizes and possibilities – all claiming your time, your energy and your interest. All manner of treasures. So sift through them. Sift the true from the false, the solid from the illusory, the silver from the tinsel, the lasting from the transient, the service of others from mere self-service. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Never let your heart settle for what is of little worth or of passing value.

A month or so ago, I was interviewing families who were hoping to enrol their sons here at Riverview. Naturally, I asked the parents why they want their sons to come here. One mother, at the time, replied, "I want my son to be amongst those who strive to help others. You always know Riverview graduates – they are men of the heart." What a perception. What a compliment. What an endorsement. "Riverview men are men of the heart."

So today, so appropriate on this Feast Day, I echo that mother's hope for each of you: be men of the heart.