



Novena of Grace 2021

Readings: [Jeremiah 7: 23-28](#) | [Psalm 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9](#) | [Luke 11: 14-23](#)

Grace: We pray for the grace to open our hearts to the many social problems around us.

Day 3

Good afternoon, I'm Pete Henriot, a Jesuit based here at Bellarmine in Tacoma. I'm really happy to be part of this Novena of Grace 2021, listening to the good thoughts of my friends Barbara Henderson and Corbin Johnson and joining in the prayers of all of you out there in "ZOOM Land"!

I want to tell you that I really paid attention today, the third day of our Novena of Grace, to our scriptures. There were several repeated expressions in these scriptures about our hearts and the conditions of our hearts.

Remember that in the first reading that the prophet Jeremiah quotes the Lord's words: "My people have walked in the hardness of their evil hearts." Then our Psalm response repeats: "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Well, these messages about heart really mean a lot to me. Let me tell you why. Just five years ago, 2016, when I was back here in Tacoma on a home visit from my apostolic assignment in Africa, I was surprised to be required to have major heart surgery, open heart surgery. An expert and very experienced heart specialist split me open, attached some extra connections to my 80-year-old heart, and then sewed me back up. Wonderful care indeed! I then spent one month of excellent rehabilitation in the Tacoma Lutheran Home. One month of more wonderful care! Some days better than others, to be honest. But here I am today, thank God!

Maybe some of you, ZOOMing in here on this third day of our Novena of Grace, have had similar surgical explorations? Well of many things, the experience of that surgery five years ago taught me first-hand the importance of my heart -- important not only to my physical wellbeing but also to my emotional stability and -- so true -- to my spiritual peace.



Novena of Grace 2021

The doctors, nurses, physical therapy attendants, all these good people, emphasized to me the need to take good physical care in the days, weeks, and months of recovery. My Jesuit brothers in my community at Bellarmine and the very fine Lutheran chaplains at the recovery facility, stressed the importance of good spiritual care, and my family and relatives and friends stressed the basic, be open to loving care from others!

It was during the Lenten season that I was recovering, and my penance that Lent of 2016 -- I still remember it -- was: "Take it easy, Pete!" Believe me, that's the toughest penance I've ever had to endure...!

So here I am today, thank God, reflecting with you on this third day of the Novena of Grace, on the very important scripture message of "Harden not your heart!" Harden not your heart! It's a message we so clearly expressed when we repeatedly responded to Psalm 95: "If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts!"

So what does that mean? And does it have any special meaning for us during this particular Novena of Grace, during this Lenten season of 2021?

In the simplest way, I suppose it means:

1. Be aware of God's great love for me and God's desire that I love him;
2. Be appreciative of the love that comes to me from family, friends, and various associates, even strangers;
3. Be ready to share acts of love, large or small, to those close to me and to those I don't even know except that they need some loving.

Harden not your hearts... Well, that's easy to say but not always so easy to practice, as you and I both know! And that's why the scripture lesson today, our third day of Novena, tells the message so strongly. In our first reading, Our Lord warns Jeremiah that the people whom he is to call are a people "who walk in the hardness of their hearts." Turning their backs, stiffening their necks...you know what that means in your life, I know what it means in my life....

Well, what about St. Francis Xavier, in his life? We know that when Francis of Spain, a well-to-do young nobleman, came to Paris to study in order to grab a well-paying job somewhere, he unfortunately landed up as a dormitory roommate with Ignatius of



Novena of Grace 2021

Loyola. I say “unfortunately” because Ignatius was a very strong character who had very strong ideas of serving God in very strong ways by sharing the Good News of Jesus!

Initially Francis closed up his heart to Ignatius’ constant question: “What does it profit someone to gain the whole world and to experience the loss of eternal life?” He really did harden his heart when he heard that question again and again: “What does it profit someone to gain the whole world and to experience the loss of eternal life?”

The biographers of Francis tell us that this young man finally listened to the questions and the lessons and the invitations of Ignatius. He joined the little group that Ignatius was putting together to save the world by sharing the Word of God. Francis let his heart be softened by God’s grace. And that opened heart led him off as a Jesuit to India, to share God’s love and to baptize thousands and thousands of people in India.

You and I know well that we need to open our hearts today, open our hearts to the many needs of the people around us. Spiritual needs, yes, but also so many material needs now, especially in the face of the serious social problems around us. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed to us the great disparities, the strong inequalities between rich and poor, between white and non-white. Our non-white population here in the United States has suffered higher percentage rates of deadly COVID-19 infection and lower percentage rates of medical services.

Conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, play, and worship affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes. Sadly, this includes COVID-19 infection, severe illness, and death. These conditions are known as the *social determinants* of health. Long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put many people from racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk of dying from COVID-19. (I’ll want to talk more about that later in our Novena....)

For now, you and I can pray to follow Francis Xavier’s example. Yes, on this third day of the Novena of Grace, **we pray for the grace to open our hearts to the many social problems around us.**

Fr. Pete Henriot, S.J.
Day 3 | March 11, 2021



Novena of Grace 2021

Reflection questions:

- *What are the key social issues that I'm concerned about?*
- *What are the demons that I want to drive out from myself so that I see and hear the truth of social issues around me?*