Voices of Sisters
Horizons
Spirituality



Sr. Kathryn Press of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (front row, second from right) poses with her ASCJ Sisters in the chapel of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque's apparitions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in Paray-le-Monial, France. (Courtesy of Kathryn Press)



by Sr. Kathryn Press

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## Join the Conversation

November 20, 2026

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It all started when I hugged a group of strangers in the Lyon airport. Not strangers, but my sisters! More than 20 of us in total, from four different countries, united by our charism as Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Together we embarked on a pilgrimage to eastern France, to Paray-le-Monial. Here in this small village, more than 350 years ago, Jesus revealed his Sacred Heart to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque.

Sacred Heart devotion wasn't a part of my faith life growing up. Rather, it was something I discovered in the convent. When I was younger, we used Isaiah 12:3 in a chapter preparation prayer: "With joy you will draw waters from the wells of salvation." In my mind, I see people dancing and singing while carrying overflowing buckets. Psalm 23 – think "to still waters he leads me" — and John 7:38 — "Rivers of living water will flow from within him" — also connect to the image of Jesus' heart pierced on the cross as a source of water to refresh us and quench our thirst.

As I steeped myself in Sacred Heart spirituality as a young sister, scriptural and historical sources alike, I found it resonated with my own sense of who Jesus was for me. I knew Jesus as echoed in the Litany of the Sacred Heart. For me he is a burning furnace of charity, patient and merciful, the source of all consolation. This pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial allowed me to immerse myself in the heart of this devotion. During my five days in France, I joyfully drank from and found refreshment at three "wells."

First, the well of holy spaces and places. Prior to this pilgrimage, my sense of the French church was limited to Lourdes, Notre Dame, and the outlandish veils of nuns from centuries long ago. There are such treasures coming from the French church! On the same day, I prayed in a basilica built around a 10th-century monastery and in a contemporary chapel. I sat before grand mosaics and the grille of a cloister. I woke up in the middle of the night for adoration by candlelight, where, echoing the words of St. Margaret Mary, I asked Jesus to give me his heart.

And while I have absolutely zero French, it wasn't hard for me to pray. Mass itself is an international language of word and gesture. The words themselves may not orient me, but the gestures do. I joined my prayer with those around me who prayed with words — and I prayed, body and heart.

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This visit also tuned my ears and heart to follow Pope Leo's September visit to France with great intentionality — and to pray for the church in France.

Second, the well of heavenly companions. After reading the biography of St. Margaret Mary as a novice, I quickly concluded we would not have been friends in real life. Too much drama for my taste! Now, praying before her tomb, I felt more connected to her than ever before. She died at 43, the same age I am now. She lived in faithful obscurity and the Lord used her as an instrument for evangelization across the globe.

At the tomb of St. John Vianney, I silently named all the priests and seminarians that came to mind, giving gratitude for their vocation and role in my life. At the tombs of St. Jane Frances de Chantal and St. Francis de Sales, I prayed for greater collaboration among all the baptized. Like St. Margaret Mary and her confessor, St. Claude La Colombière, Francis and Jane partnered together in friendship to serve the needs of the church.

And, while she was burned alive and therefore doesn't have a tomb, I couldn't help but feel the prayers of my confirmation saint, St. Joan of Arc, during my time in France, too.

Third, the well of earthly pilgrims. They're not strangers; they're my sisters! One of the greatest blessings for me in religious life is belonging to an international congregation. It never ceases to amaze me how much we can communicate through hand gestures, laughter and a translation app.

Our community gifted us with this pilgrimage to mark 10 years of final vows, or 25 or 50 years of religious profession. Our common consecration united us, just as it inspired us to return to these wells for refreshment and encouragement. We laughed and prayed. We sent way too many photos in the group chat. We each came away renewed and strengthened by the water from these holy wells.

Where are you experiencing the treasures of His Heart? What are the wells of salvation that you joyfully return to time and time again?