

Today we are celebrating the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, our parish patronal feast day. The heart is the great symbol of love, we don't even need the word, the symbol of the heart will do, and in celebrating the feast of the Sacred Heart we are celebrating God's love for each and every one of us. The prophet Ezekiel in the first reading uses the image of the shepherd, such a powerful image of God in the Old Testament, and taken up by Jesus himself when he calls himself the Good Shepherd. There are some powerful verbs, all of which speak of care and love for others; keep in view, rescue, gather together, bring back, pasture, feed, show them where to rest. And then the final two sentences – "I shall look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded and make the weak strong. I will watch over the fat and healthy, I shall be a true shepherd to them." This is love in action.

St Paul in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading reminded us that the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. And this God does without our ever deserving it, as St Paul writes, 'what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.' And finally the Gospel, taking up the image of the shepherd again, a shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep until he finds it and invites his neighbours to rejoice at his find. A rejoicing which pales into insignificance compared to the rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner. This is love in action.

The statue of the Sacred Heart here in front of the altar for this celebration is a visible reminder of God's love for each one of us shown most especially in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The fingers of the statue are pointing to the heart, one hand raised in blessing, another word for wanting what is best for each of us. Love in action.

We sometimes use the expression, "the heart of the matter," and on this feast the heart of the matter is the person of Christ and each one of us. When we are united and are "of one heart and mind," there is a powerful spiritual union between the heart of Jesus and our own hearts which shows itself in care and love for others. Let me just read from a very recent email, from Fr Luis: *"Greetings from farmer Joe, Jose, Maria and Anna Maria. They were busy discussing topics of the land and Jose has started a recycling project. Educating people on reusing, not wasting, recycling and sharing. A lot of activity in the Co-operative. Anna Maria is still educating on crop rotation and they just turn up with various seeds and ask her advice.....next thing I see her going off on a truck with them. A few hours later she appears and is stocked with various foods for us. She has made such a difference to the farmers. Maria is running cookery classes. She is a first class cook. And she teaches bread making and vegetable stews. So it is all go. She also has a woman's group for sewing. They lead teams and they all come from different villages. Magnifico. Sometimes I go with them and celebrate Mass and while they do their work, I visit families' homes and sit and chat."* This is love in action.

We cannot hoard the Heart of Jesus. As with the Eucharist it is a gift to be shared. At the end of this Mass we will be sent out to put into action the Scripture we have heard. We might take Ezekiel's advice by 'looking for the lost one, bringing back the stray, (like the shepherd in the gospel) bandaging the wounded and making the weak strong.' This is love in action, or, as Pope Francis has said having concern for 'The wider we'!

## Bidding Prayers for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart

Celebrant:

Confident of God's abiding love for each one of us shown today in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we turn to him in prayer.

Reader:

We pray for the Church under the guidance of Pope Francis – that it will always proclaim the Good News of there being rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner.

Lord in your mercy

For our political and civic leaders – that they will do all they can to broker peace between nations and to assure a fairer distributions of the world's resources.

Lord in your mercy

We pray for the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart: Fathers Jeremiah Buckley, Jerome O'Hanlon, Sean Moynihan, John Wallace, James Dudley, Richard Scriven, Kieran Burke, Joseph Falloon and Jimmy Stubbs who served in this parish from 1952 until 2012 – that the Lord will receive into eternal glory those who have died and continue to bless those who are retired.

Lord in your mercy

We pray for all those who are burdened by physical, mental or emotional illness – that they will experience the healing presence of Christ and the love and support of family and friends.

Lord in your mercy

We pray for those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the Covid 19 pandemic, and Donald Chadderton, Francis O'Gara, Elizabeth Lally, Peter Bennison and Michael Bernard Crewdson whose anniversaries occur this week - that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory. Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord hear us

We ask the prayers of Mary the mother of the Lord as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Almighty God and Father we glory in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, your beloved Son, as we call to mind the great things his love has done for us. Fill us with the grace that flows in abundance from the heart of Jesus, the source of heaven's gifts. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.