

Readings: *Ezekiel 34: 11 – 16; Ps. 22 (23); Romans 5: 5 – 11; Luke 15: 3 – 7.*

Today's Feast celebrates the love of Jesus for all whom the Father has created – love described in a 19th century hymn as *“that great love, which like a fire, is always burning in his heart.”*

The Old Testament Reading, the Psalm, and the Gospel Reading share the well-known theme of the Good Shepherd for cares for all his sheep – particularly the lost.

In today's reading from his letter to the Romans Paul – as so often – presents us with a more complex picture. In the earlier chapters of the letter he has dealt with the just anger of God against evil and the failure of law to protect sinners from his judgement. He is writing about the Jewish Law, but his argument holds for any moral system which teaches that an individual can make himself or herself right in God's eyes by his or her own efforts: *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (3: 23)*. But God has provided a way out of this hopeless state. We can be *justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (3: 24)*.

But the question arises – probably for anyone who is serious in their faith – “How can I know that this is true? How can I be sure that I am *justified* – that is ‘right with God’?” Paul's answer is: *What proved that God loves us is that Christ died for us when we were still sinners.*

This, Paul argues, shows that God loves us unconditionally, so we can have confidence in that love to bring us to salvation. So, he writes, *we are filled with joyful trust in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ*. But there is an unspoken condition – not a condition about God's love for us, but a condition about our willingness to live in that love.

Paul writes: *Surely, we may count on being saved by the life of (God's) Son*. He probably did not intend to suggest that Christ's death has one result and his resurrection another. Rather, he means that we have to live *in Christ* – that is in the power of his risen life. In verses in Chapter 6 (which we hear at the Easter Vigil) he will teach that by baptism we are *buried with him...so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life*.

In today's solemnity we offer thanks to God the Father for his unconditional love, revealed to us in his crucified and risen Son, and we offer ourselves afresh to *walk in newness of life* – by the power of the overflowing love which comes to us from the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.