

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

The month of June is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and as this month comes to a close, I would like to reflect on how the readings for the Solemnity on Friday, June 28th give us a glimpse into the Sacred Heart. The primary theme among these readings is understanding God as “shepherd”. The first reading (Ezekiel 34:11-16) can be summarized in the line “I myself will pasture my sheep and I myself will give them rest.” I find the emphasis of “I myself” quite interesting. The word “myself” adds a certain directness to it. We do not have a God that is distant, but rather one that is intimately close with us and desires to be united with us. He does not say, “I will send someone to pasture my sheep on my behalf,” but He says “I *myself* will pasture my sheep.” This promise is fulfilled in Christ, who is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). God Himself, out of His love for us, lowered Himself by taking on our humanity in order to gather us, the flock, into His rest. This rest that Christ wants to bring us into *is* His Sacred Heart. Saint Augustine says in *The Confessions* “our heart is restless until it rests in You.” The Sacred Heart is a place of rest and of peace.

The second reading (Romans 5:5B-11) shows the proof of God’s love for us. This proof is found in the crucifixion of Jesus. In keeping with the theme of the Good Shepherd, John 10:11 says that “the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.” Jesus did not *have* to die on the cross in order to liberate man from sin. Since He is all-powerful, He could have done it any other way. This understanding brings to light how much God loves us because He *chose* to suffer a brutal death for us as an act of love. The crucifixion and death of our Lord shows the burning passion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is rooted in sacrifice and utter self-gift. He completes our understanding of shepherd, in that it is not merely the gathering in of sheep, but it is that the shepherd is willing to lay down his own life in order to save the lives of the sheep.

This brings us to the Gospel (Luke 15:3-7) which is the Parable of the Lost Sheep. Jesus says, “What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets in on his shoulders with great joy”. He then recounts how the shepherd rejoices with his friends and neighbors over finding the lost sheep. I find interesting how the shepherd in this parable does not simply lead the sheep back with his staff, but he carries the sheep over shoulders. Our Lord does not nonchalantly lead us back into the fold. He takes us upon Himself and carries us back in joy to the sheepfold. He rejoices in our return! The Sacred Heart of Jesus longs for our return to Him so that He may rejoice in us! He desires union with us in His Sacred Heart, to remain in rest with Him. He even proves to us His love by laying down His life for us! As this month of the Sacred Heart comes to a close, may we consecrate ourselves to the heart of the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep.