

THE SACRIFICE THAT SAVED THE WORLD

Do you remember the story of Transfiguration? While Jesus was on the holy mountain of the transfiguration with his disciples, clouds from heaven came and overshadowed them. Moses and Elijah, representing the laws and the prophets, appeared at that instant and our Lord conversed with them about his Exodus. He would finish this Exodus, in Jerusalem, on Good Friday. We call this day Good Friday, the day our Lord died on the cross for our salvation. His resurrection and ascension would be the climax of his journey.

The Lord's Exodus recalls and relives the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land. The first Exodus came with the deaths of the first-born of men and beasts of the oppressors. The slaughtering male Lambs and smearing their blood at the entrances of the houses of God's children kept the slaying angel and death away from their homes. In obedience to God, they ate the roasted lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. Then came their freedom to leave the land of slavery and bondage for the Promised Land. Moses was their leader. In the new Exodus, our Lord is the leader. Our destination is not Canaan in Galilee . Our destination is paradise, the new and eternal Jerusalem.

To understand what the Lord did for us on Good Friday, think of what happened to the Lamb. The Passover Lamb is a prefigure of the Lord. Through the death and blood of the Lamb, God's people were granted freedom from slavery, oppression, and death. Above all they gained freedom to worship God. The Death of Christ, our Passover Lamb, brought us much more. He removed the walls of enmity and alienation between us and himself. Elucidating this point St Paul writes, "In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end" (Ephesians 2:13-16). Earlier on, Isaiah prophesied, "Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear." (Isaiah 53:11). "Because he surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked; and he shall take away the sins of many and win pardon for their offenses" (Isaiah 53:12).

Who is this servant of God? It is the Messiah. The word "Servant," used here does not mean that Jesus is less than the Father and Holy Spirit. Jesus took the opposite course from Adam and Eve. They wanted to grab and grasp by force of defiance an equality with God. On the other hand, "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8). Love to the end is the reason for the humility and self-emptying

of God. Love is the reason why we are here this evening. Love is the reason Christ was born, betrayed, arrested, scourged and crucified. However, the love of God's Son expressed in humility yielded blessings beyond our wildest imaginations. He brought us salvation and God's exaltation. "God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11).

Dear brothers and sisters, what is the Lord saying to us today. He tells of his great love which is stronger than death. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). St Melito of Sardis put it movingly, "Having then a body capable of suffering, Christ took the pain of fallen man upon himself; he triumphed over the diseases of soul and body that were its cause, and by his Spirit, which was incapable of dying, he dealt man's destroyer, death, a fatal blow" (St Melito of Sardis, Office of the Readings, Holy Thursday. God died for us! He anticipated his death before and during the last Supper. Before the Last Supper he washed the feet of disciples. The disciples represent all of us. God washes our soiled feet and dries them. "It is the servant-love of Jesus that draws us out of our pride and makes us fit for God, makes us clean" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two*, p.57). During the Last Supper our Lord gave body and blood for us when he said, take and eat this is my body. Take and drink this is my blood. These anticipated actions of our Lord came to life in a fullest sense on Good Friday. Today's readings, especially the Passion narratives, say it all. "In Jesus's Passion, all the filth of the world touches the infinitely pure, the soul of Jesus Christ, and, hence,

the Son of God himself. Through this contact the filth of the world is truly absorbed, wiped out, and transformed in the pain of infinite love" (Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two*, p.231). God in his own person addressed "the reality of evil and injustice that disfigures the world and distorts the image of God. God himself becomes the locus of reconciliation, and in the person of his son takes the suffering upon himself. God grants his infinite purity to the world. God himself drinks the cup of every horror to the dregs and thereby restores justice through the greatness of his love, which, through suffering, transforms the darkness" (Ibid., p.232).

What God did for us calls us to hold human life with great reverence, to protect and cherish it at all stages from conception to death. It also calls us to show our back to what caused God to die on the cross. And if you have the misfortune of falling into sin, do not kill yourself. Go to confession. Do not indulge in Judas' kind of sorrow. His was the wrong type of remorse, "the type that is unable to hope, that sees only its own darkness, the type that is destructive and in no way authentic. Genuine remorse is marked by certainty of hope born of faith in the superior power of the light that was made flesh in Jesus" (Ibid. p.69).
