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Good Friday of the Lord's Passion

Today the world is forever changed; nothing shall ever be the same again. Today God has given his life for man, the sinless for the sinners. Today "he was pierced for our offenses" (Isaiah 52:5). Today we experience the ultimate power and mystery of love.

His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. By contemplating the pierced side of Christ, we can understand ... [that] 'God is love' (I John 4:8) (Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 12).

What can anyone do before such love? What can anyone say upon seeing the depth of such love? Who would have thought a love of this magnitude could ever be experienced? Love has come to us and today Love died in our place. "Because of him kings shall stand speechless" (Isaiah 52:15). Such is the power of this love.

What adequate response can be given in response to so powerful a love? There are two fundamental reactions and responses to this love: we can either accept this love in all humility, or we can reject this love in all of our pride. The choice is ours but the choice must be made.

Last night Judas willingly took those cursed coins and handed the Savior over to death. It was Judas who went to the chief priests and asked them, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" (Matthew 26:15). Indeed, the chief priests "were pleased and promised to pay him money" (Mark 14:11). It was his own idea to betray the Messiah; he freely sold his Teacher and Master for a few pieces of silver. He saw the power of Jesus' love as he followed him for three years. He saw how dearly Jesus loved his disciples. At the same time, Judas knew that Jesus loved him as well, but Judas would not return any love at all. He refused to accept the love of the Lord; he completely rejected Love himself. Judas represents the ultimate rejection of the Lord.

To accept this love of the Savior we can follow the example of the three Marys, of Joseph of Arimathea, of Nicodemus. These followers of the Lord did not leave his side. They accompanied Jesus on this most difficult of journeys as he gave his life for us. They opened themselves to experience his love and his love they returned as best they could, even after his death. In love, they served him who died for us, and so should we. The Holy Father encourages us in this love, saying,

We offer him our service only to the extent that we can, and for as long as he grants us the strength. To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of Jesus Christ always at work: "The

love of Christ urges us on" (II Corinthians 5:14) (Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, 35).

We know, also, that although many of us truly do love the Lord Jesus, we do not always follow him and serve him faithfully. We forsake him, we abandon him, and we sin against him. We sinners then can follow the example of Saint Peter who three times denied the Lord and sinned against him. Even so, he powerfully experienced the merciful love of Jesus when "the Lord turned and looked at Peter" and Peter "went out and began to weep bitterly" (Luke 22:61, 62).

As tears fill our eyes as we acknowledge that we, too, have sinned against the Lord, let us gaze upon the crucified Lord who was pierced for us. Let us look up into his face lowered down to look upon us and see there the very face of love. Let us run into his arms so lovingly and gently extended and held out to embrace us. Let us take refuge within his holy and glorious wounds and allow our hearts to be filled with his mercy and love.

Let us look upon the one whose heart was pierced for us and know the fullness of the truth that "God is love." "Behold the man!" (John 19:6).