

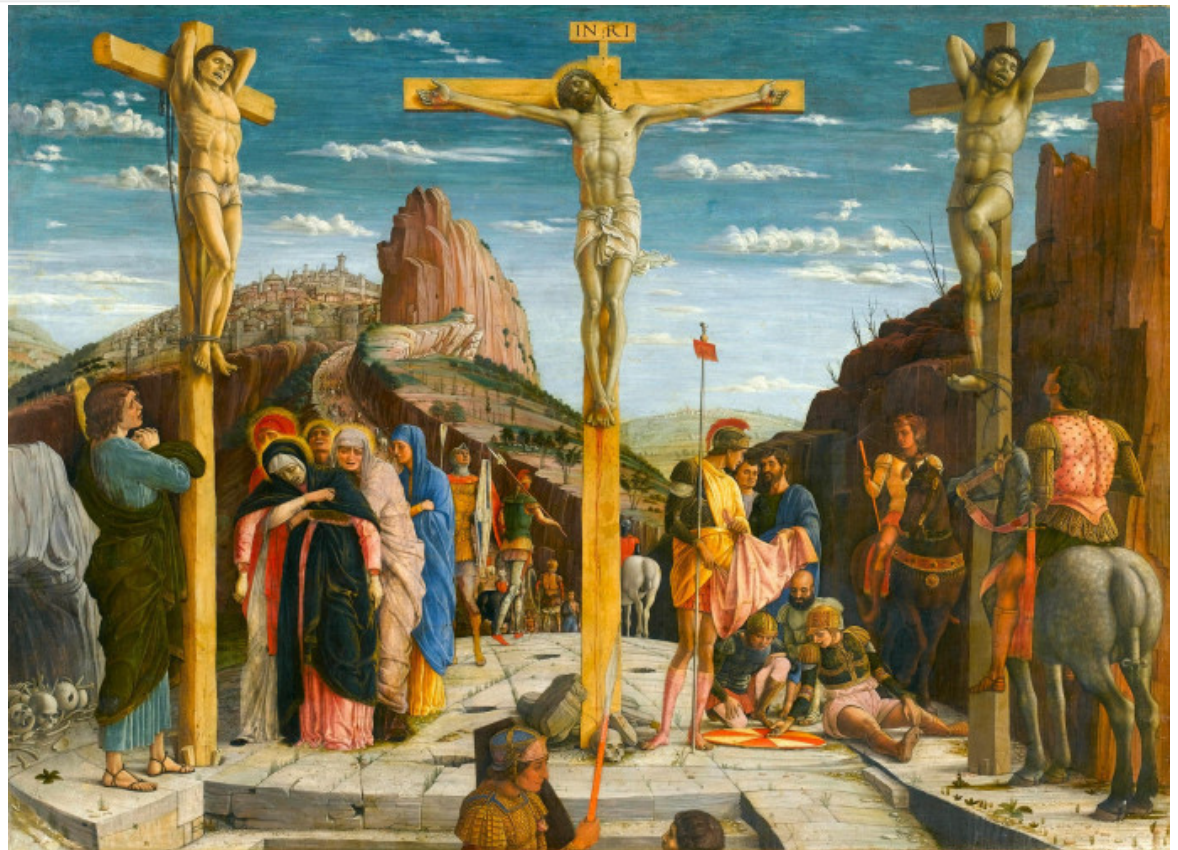
GOOD FRIDAY

## Saying yes to the love that redeemed the world

ECCLESIA

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“I am contemporary with Christ who willingly died for me, for my sin. The Son of God has become for me like the Prodigal Son” (cf. Gal 3:13). “He has carried our sorrows” (Is 53:4) “to open up for us the way to the joy of possessing God and being possessed by God” (cf. 1 Jn 3:1)

**Why?**

Here lies the incredible mystery of God's love and the heart of all Christianity. If I look for a reason for God's love for me, I do not find it. It is unconditional; it is agape, it is the gift of self. In fact: *"God demonstrates his love for us in the fact that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Now, hardly anyone is willing to die for the righteous; perhaps someone would dare to die for a good person (human behaviour). But God demonstrates His love for us in the fact that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"*. (Rom 5:7ff).

**God's love is agape;** it is free initiative and precedes any response on my part. John explains this truth: *"This is how God's love for us was manifested: God sent His only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: it was not we who loved God, but He loved us and sent His Son as a victim of atonement for our sins"* (1 Jn 4:9-10). *"God is love [unconditional love]; he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him"* (1Jn 4:16). Therefore no one can boast before God: *"Where then is the boasting? He has been excluded!"* (Rom 3:27).

**All that remains for us is to love as God loves:** *"We love [with agape] because He first loved us [with agape]!"* (1 Jn 4:19).

If the Christian lacks agape (unconditional love), his Christianity is null, it is non-existent. *"And if I had the gift of prophecy, if I knew all mysteries and had all knowledge, if I possessed so much faith that I could move mountains, but did not have charity, I would be nothing"* (1 Cor 13:2).

In this mystery (agape) the love of God and neighbour are reunited: *"For this reason the Father loves me [love of God], because I lay down my life [love of neighbour]"* (Jn 10:17): God is self-giving; whoever lives by giving himself possesses God because he has received the mystery of God within himself.

### **Who then is the Christian?**

The Christian is a man who lives by faith (cf. Rom 1:17), that is, who has regulated his entire existence on the only possibility opened up to him by Jesus Christ, obedient for us all even to the cross (cf. Phil 2:8): the possibility of participating in the obedient yes that redeems the world.

**The mystery of Christ passes into the Christian,** who must have within him the Spirit of Christ that impels him to offer himself freely and unconditionally for the salvation of the world.

*"For their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth"* (Jn 17:19).

*"For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you"* (Jn 13:15).

*"That is why the Father loves me: because I give my life, and then take it up again"* (Jn 10:17).

**The Christian lives in this faith and has within him** the mystery of death and resurrection (cf. Rom 6:4 and the whole chapter). And if someone does not have this Spirit of Christ, he is not of Christ (cf. Rom 8:9).

The presence of the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection in the life of the Christian leads him to an inner polemic with the world in all vanity.

*“So that we no longer look at anyone in the human way; even if we have known Christ in the human way, we no longer know him so”. (2 Cor 5:16). “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 15:50). “But these things, which for me were gains, I considered to be a loss because of Christ. Indeed, I consider everything a loss because of the sublimity of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord. For His sake I have given up all these things and consider them rubbish, in order to gain Christ and be found in him, having as my righteousness not that which comes from the Law, but that which comes from faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God, based on faith” (Phil 3:7-9).*

**He is crucified with Christ (cf. Gal 2:20) and lives by Christ**, longing for His return (cf. Rev 22:20) and preferring Christ to any other thing or person, because if he wants to be a disciple of Jesus he must deny himself in his flesh (cf. Lk 9:23) and lose his human life for Christ (cf. Lk 9:24).

**In this choice, the Christian knows that he will have persecutions**, mockeries, clashes even with his nearest and dearest. The Christian accepts them because he knows that the love of Christ brings division (cf. Lk 12:51) and scandal to those who do not believe.

His master had foretold it to him: the disciple cannot have a fate different from that of the master (cf. Jn 15:18 ff).

**The Christian does not look for the clash, but if it comes, he accepts it serenely** because it is necessary for him to bear witness to Christ: for if the Christian is ashamed of Jesus and His word, Jesus will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory and that of the Father (cf. Lk 9:26-27).

**This controversy with the world is not sought by the Christian.** It is the world that fights the Christian and even leads him to martyrdom. But the Christian loves gratuitously like Jesus and in this gratuitous love reveals God.

*"Until now we suffer hunger, thirst, nakedness, we are beaten, we wander from place to place, we toil working with our hands. Insulted, we bless; persecuted, we endure; slandered, we comfort; we have become like the trash of the world, the refuse of all, until now" (1 Cor 4:11-13).*

*"Because we are His co-workers, we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For He says: At the favourable time I have heard you, and on the day of salvation I have helped you. Now is the favourable time, now is the day of salvation! For our part we give no cause for scandal to anyone, lest our ministry be criticised; but in all things we present ourselves as ministers of God with great firmness: in tribulations, in necessities, in afflictions, in beatings, in prisons, in tumults, in labours, in vigils, in fasting; with purity, with wisdom, with magnanimity, with kindness, with a spirit of holiness, with sincere love, with the word of truth, with the power of God; with the weapons of justice at his right and his left; in glory and in dishonour, in evil and in good fame; as impostors, yet we are true; as strangers, yet we are well known; as dying, yet we live; as punished, yet not slain; as afflicted, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet able to enrich many; as people who have nothing, yet we possess everything!" (2 Cor 6:1-10).*

**The words of Jesus also apply to the Christian:** *"They shall look upon him whom they have pierced" (Jn 19:37).*

Love is the verification that the Christian remains in Jesus and possesses Jesus.

Therefore the Christian does not provoke strife and divisions with his brothers, but seeks the fusion of charity with all in the patience of love.

Whoever does not do this cannot be called a faithful Christian, because he sins against Christ (cf. Titus 3:10-11) and all that remains is to leave the community, because his heart is already outside it.

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