

Good Friday, April 22, 2011 Year A
John 18:1 – 19:42

One of the most difficult things we ever have to face in this life is when the love we show others **is not returned**.

I'm sure you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Sometimes it happens between spouses ---

one gives and gives and gives, and feels that the other **takes it for granted**.

It happens with our friends sometimes too.

Those times when we find ourselves willing and eager to do just about anything for someone we care about but they are **not there for us** when we need them the most.

And mothers and fathers occasionally experience this same sort of thing with their daughters and sons. Especially during their teenage years.

And, of course, children are disappointed when they feel no love in return.

Sadly, we don't always receive the same level of kindness we show to those we love the most.

There are even times when those we have been good to turn around and cause us great pain or sorrow.

And even something as simple as not receiving a "thank you" make us feel a little hurt inside.

Simply put, when we show others love, **we'd like for them to show us a little love too**. That just seems to be a normal part of the human experience.

We love it when we are loved back, don't we?

Yet, that's not what's happened in the Passion of Our Lord.

Here's the Good News of Good Friday.

God didn't send his Son because **we** loved him.

Jesus didn't climb the hill of Calvary because **we** loved him.

No matter how hard it is for us to understand or believe, God doesn't love us because **we** love him.

He loves us first --- unconditionally and completely.

When we disobey, God loves us anyway.

When we wander away from him, he loves us anyway.

When we ignore his voice and place our will above his, he loves us anyway.

That's just who He is.

That's the incredible God who created us and sustains us each and every day.

That's the God revealed to us in Jesus, the God who carried his cross **so that we might have life.**

We just heard the account of the greatest love story ever told. The greatest lover who ever lived performed a **perfect act of love.** Jesus, laying down his life for us.

You see, God loves us more than we could even love ourselves. It's really almost impossible for us to comprehend.

And yet, as we contemplate this great mystery, we try, as best we can, to fill our hearts and minds, with some inadequate amount of gratitude

--- grateful for the gift of Jesus **pouring out his very life on our behalf.**

And while Jesus' act of love fills our hearts with gratitude and hope, it also presents us with a **challenge.**

For if we believe that love should be returned with love, **then that gives us cause to reflect.** If we truly believe that God has loved us first, then we must ask ourselves some important questions.

Will we, as his disciples, respond to his selflessness with selfless acts of our own?

Will we carry our own crosses for our sake and for the sake of others?

Will we forgive those who have wronged us knowing that Jesus died for the forgiveness of the sins of each and every one of us?

Will we have the courage and willingness to love all people in every situation?

Will we continue to respond with love when love is not returned?

My dear friends, in a few moments we will venerate the cross, a symbol of **hope** and a symbol of **God's great love for us**.

And by doing so, we are showing a sense of gratitude for all the Lord has done for us and continues to do for us each and every day.

But let it not be the only way we show how much Jesus means to us.

Let's not just venerate it. Let's embrace it.

Let's embrace it in our daily lives.

Embrace it by pouring out love on those around us.

Embrace it by knowing that God loves us, more than we can imagine.

Of that we can be certain.

May we never take that love for granted.

Instead, let's make sure it gets returned (imperfectly, for sure --- but returned nonetheless).

May God fill each of our hearts **with true gratitude** on these holiest of days. And those to come.