

After seeing Mel Gibson's classic film *The Passion of Christ* for the first time in 2004, I remember saying to myself that, given the film's pretty accurate portrayal of just how brutal Roman crucifixions were, I would never look at a crucifix the same way again. And for the most part, that's been true, but I feel like as Catholics who may be *rightfully* surrounded by crucifixes, there's always a temptation for us *to forget* and *to grow numb* to the power and meaning of Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross—*to grow numb* to the love that the crucifix represents—*to grow numb* to just how much Jesus actually suffered *for my sins* and for *your sins* in order to save us.

In fact, the great Roman orator Cicero, who lived in the second and first century BC, said that, "of all punishments, [crucifixion] is the most cruel and most terrifying." Similarly, Flavius Josephus, the great Jewish historian who lived in the first century AD, wrote that crucifixion was, "the most wretched of deaths." Now while I have no doubt that Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, does a good job in depicting the historical reality of just how horrific Roman crucifixions were,

something tells me that what Jesus actually endured, was *probably exponentially worse* than what's portrayed in the movie.

So given *everything* we just read in John's account of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all of the pain, suffering, humiliation, and torture that our Savior *freely* and *actually* endured, I just have one question: *do you honestly know how much God loves you? Do you truly, seriously know how precious you are in the eyes of God?*

Because if you *don't know*, then I'm here to tell you that *THIS is how much you are loved by God! THIS is how precious you are in the eyes of God!*

Now I don't say this because I'm some champion of moral relativism who's just trying to give you all these "nice fuzzy wuzzy" feelings inside and somehow justify objectively sinful and selfish behavior. No, I'm saying this to you in order to *truly comfort you* and to lovingly *challenge* and *encourage* you as disciples of our crucified Savior! Because brothers and sisters, if we *only knew how much we are loved, then* we would know *how much we need to love! If we only*

*knew how much we are loved by God, then we would know how much we should love God in return by rejecting sin and embracing virtue!*

In the Passion and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ, God went to *extreme lengths to prove just how much He loves us*. God Himself suffered and died a horrible death *because of us* and *for us*—all in order to save us from our sins and give us eternal life with Him. This is why we can call today “Good” Friday: because God lovingly brought the *most awesome Good*, our eternal salvation, out of the most *heinous evil*.

In his great encyclical entitled “Faith and Reason”: Pope St. John Paul II eloquently said, “Reason cannot eliminate the mystery of love which the cross represents, while the cross can give to reason the ultimate answer which it seeks.” Brothers and sisters, the great love that God expressed for us on the cross is *precisely* the perfect, self-giving, and unconditional love that we as human creatures naturally desire and yearn for with every fiber of our being. And yes, *this is the love* that we as disciples of the crucified Christ are called to *embody* and make present in the midst of this suffering world. This victorious, life-giving, merciful, and risk-taking love is *exactly the type of love* that we as

disciples of Christ are called to live in the midst of our daily lives with the help of God's grace. And yet, this is the love that we tragically reject every time we sin and selfishly assert ourselves over Christ.

So brothers and sisters, the *best* way to honor Jesus' ultimate sacrifice for us on the cross—the best way to *respond* to the perfect love that was poured out for us today is to give our whole lives to Christ in sincere love and gratitude, firmly reject the sins in our lives that *He* died for, and embrace the hope and salvation that *He* won for us. Dear Jesus, may we never forget or grow numb to the victorious love of the cross!

Amen.