

DAY 5.

Jesus went to meet His Enemies.

OUR LORD JESUS, knowing that Judas, His betrayer, had come, surrounded by a devilish crowd of wicked men who were thirsting for His Blood, and who had come with exceeding cruelty to take Him, as if He had been a thief, with lanterns, and swords, and cords, and with a great noise of arms, like an innocent Lamb, with great affection and burning love went forth to meet them, saying: “Whom do you seek?”

Consider now, O my soul, with your inward eyes, the immense love of your Saviour; see how above measure He thirst to redeem you. Look how His Heart is boiling over within Him for exceeding burning love. O sweet Jesus, the only comfort of my heart, where is now the fear, which a little before had come upon you? Where now are your deep groans? Where now are your trembling limbs? Where now is your great horror of death? While as yet Your enemies were far from you, You were sorrowful even unto death, and in your cruel plight You did sweat blood, and You did pray that the Passion that was hanging over you might be taken from you by your Father; but now that Your enemies are before Your eyes, roaring like lions, and raging like mad dogs to shed Your innocent Blood, You feared nothing, You trembled at nothing, and all fear had gone far from you. Your betrayer had come with a crowd of blood-thirsty men, cruel wolves; and of Your own free will You went forth to meet them. What does this mean, O gracious Jesus, except that perfect love has cast out fear?

Oh! how perfectly have You gone out of yourself, O loving Jesus! How well have You prepared a place for your heavenly Father, in order that He may accomplish within you, His own most gracious

work according to His will. Oh! how You have spared yourself in nothing! With what burning thirst have You sought after your Father's honor! How mightily have You conquered yourself through love, being made obedient even unto death! O Jesus, sweet Lover of men, what love is this that has so swallowed up your Heart, that You hastened to death as to a marriage feast, that You went forth to meet Your enemies, as if they were your friends! You could not even wait till they addressed you, but even as a man saluted his friends, whom he met on the way, so You addressed them first, and said: "Whom do you seek?" Oh! Truly, most gracious Jesus, the fire of love had so worked its way within you, and melted, and burnt away the marrow of your Soul, that all your inner man blessed God the Father Almighty, and all your members were stretched like a bow to accomplish your Father's gracious will. For Your uncreated love as God so moved and kindled Your created love, that You were wholly ready to satisfy that love in all that it required. Hence it was that in your thirst You seized the chalice, from which but a little before You did so greatly shrink; and quickened by love, as a fearless giant, You rejoiced to run the way of our salvation.

O most gracious Lord, who is there that would not be inflamed by love like this? Who am I, and Who are You, that You, the Lord of lords, You, the Ruler of heaven and earth, should offer yourself to such a shameful death, and into the very hands of your cruel enemies, for me who am but a poor vile worm of earth; and that You should receive him who betrayed you as if he were your brother? No, not even from Judas, that ungrateful dog, did You turn away, O well-spring of inexhaustible mercy, even when he blushed not to seek a kiss from your sacred mouth; but You did gently place that sweet and loving mouth of Yours, in which there was no guile, against that foul mouth of his, overflowing, though it was, with malice. Oh! the incomprehensible gentleness, the wonderful lovingkindness, the unspeakable lowliness, the measureless goodness of the Master towards His cruel servant! Truly, Lord, it would be better for that man if he had never been born! O sweet Jesus, so continuous was your goodness, that You did show him all the kindness that You could, in order, if possible, to soften his heart of stone. With kind, friendly words You spoke to him, and said: "Friend, why did You come

near?” As if You would say: “Have I deserved this of you, O Judas? Did I sin against you, in washing your feet, in bending My knees to you, in refreshing you with My Body and Blood? Friend, for what reason have You come? Do you hold Me of less value than thirty pieces of silver? Why have You turned away from Me, Who honored you by the title of apostle, Who brought you up in delights, and taught you with all loving care, as My own son? Why have You forsaken Me, the well of living water, and joined yourself to the servants of the devil? Why have your heart gone after greed, and why have You left Me, the highest and Eternal Good, and sold Me for a poor wretched price, although I have within Me the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and I enrich and fill both heaven and earth? Friend, for what reason have You come? Turn and look into Your own self, I pray that you descend a little into yourself, come back to Your own heart, and see the depth to which You have fallen; observe what You have done. Even now My grace is open to you; only come back with sorrow unto Me, and I will receive you.”

Who can restrain his tears, when he considers Christ’s ineffable kindness to His betrayer? Who, after this, shall dare to lose hope of God’s mercy? O sweetest Jesus, if You have been so faithful, and loving, and kind to the traitor, and the enemy, your wicked and unfaithful servant, and have so labored to call him back to you, and save him, what, therefore, will You do to your dear friends, who seek, and love, and thirst after you with their whole life? Truly, You are no respecter of persons, nor do You desire the death and destruction of the wicked, but rather that they should be turned from their wickedness, and live. For You have embraced all men in your Heart, nor do You cast away any man from you, save those alone, who by their own free but evil will, and hardness in sin, depart from you. Oh! how grieved was our gentle Savior, that His own disciple should betray Him with a kiss! Bitterly enough He complained of this by the prophet, when He said: “If My enemy had spoken evil against Me, I would indeed have borne it, but that You, the man of My peace, My friend and disciple, in whom I hoped, and who sat and ate meat with Me, should betray against Me, and sell Me for a vile

sum of money, and deliver Me to death! O Judas, what is the reason that You come? Do You betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

But now return a while to yourself, O my soul, and see, I beg you, how impatient, how cruel and greedy of vengeance you are. By a single word you are moved to anger, to reproachful words, and to avenge yourself. Truly Christ did not disdain to speak to His betrayer, and to call him friend, and to sweetly kiss him. Oh! how many times I pass by my neighbor, thinking it beneath me to speak to him, and by such disdain or contempt provoke him to hatred, and thus I lose his soul when I might have softened him by a friendly look or kind word, and moved him to love.

But Christ addressed also His other enemies with friendly words, and said: "Whom do you seek?" They answered Him: "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them: "I am He." And when He had said this, they went backwards, and fell upon the ground. Here St Augustine cried out: "'I am He,' by this one word, expressive of His hidden Godhead, without a weapon of any kind, He struck down, drove back, laid low so great a multitude that had come out against Him, fierce in wrath, and terrible in arms, for God lay hidden in the flesh. What will he do when He comes to judge the world, who did this when he is about to be judged Himself? What will he do when He shall reign, who could do this when he is about to die?" After this sign He gave them again power to rise, and raised them, as it were, from death; and a second time He said: "Whom do you seek?" They said to Him: "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered: "I have told you that I am He." Listen, O my soul, to this sweet word of your Savior. He Who a little before had laid them low upon the ground by one word of His power, by the same word now graciously delivered Himself over to death, saying: "I have told you that I am He;" as if He would say: "I am ready to fulfill My Father's will, and to offer Myself a living victim to My Father's honor and glory, for the salvation of men. I am ready now, not only to bear all the sins of the world, but also to undergo the penalties which are due to them, and to blot out that old

hand-writing of their cruel enemy in My own Blood, and to redeem man from eternal death. Your High Priest spoke truly when he prophesied, that one man needs to die for the people, that the whole nation will not perish. I am that Man; I am that innocent Lamb, ready to be offered for the sins of My people. Therefore it is, that now I give Myself into your hands. Often, indeed, you have desired both to take and to kill Me, but My hour had not yet come. Now that hour has come, and the power of darkness. Sate now your thirst, and your rage against Me. I am He Whom you seek; I am ready to bear whatever you can think of to do against Me. Take Me, seize Me, bind Me, lead Me to death itself; but suffer these to go their way. No power has been given you over My disciples; only against Me you have power to rage.”

O unspeakable love! Oh! Truly, You are the good Shepherd. See, how He loved His little flock even to the end, placing Himself between them and the teeth of these ravenous wolves. How willingly He suffered Himself to be mangled, and torn, and killed, that the sheep of His little fold might go unhurt. Then with great fierceness did they take Him, and like mad dogs, fastened their cruel fangs upon this innocent Lamb.