

Betrayed with a Kiss
Is it I, Lord?

Today, the Wednesday between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, is a very important day of Holy Week and a very significant day in our journey of faith. The Church has long called this day "Spy Wednesday". A dark and sinister day as the name implies, most prefer to overlook its meaning and message. But today is also referred to as the "Holy and Great Wednesday" in the Eastern Church, and the "Good Wednesday" in the Western Church. What we recall on this night is one of the most tragic and mysterious stories in all of scripture. It is, of course, the Betrayal of Jesus. "Then went out one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, to the chief priests and said to them, "What will you give me and I will deliver Him unto you?" And they appointed him 30 pieces of silver. And from henceforth he sought opportunity to betray Him. Matthew 26:14-16. The other synoptic Gospel accounts are found in Mark 14:10, and Luke 22:3-6. If a poll were taken to determine the most despised man in the Bible, Judas would most likely win. Runners up would probably be King Herod, who tried to kill Jesus at His birth. Having failed, he ordered the death of all the male born inhabitants in Bethlehem, two years old and under. Perhaps Pontius Pilot, who on Friday would condemn Jesus to death by crucifixion, would also make the list. The problem for us, the people of faith, is that Judas is too close for comfort. He was NOT an enemy from without, but rather he was an enemy from within. Judas was not a casual follower, or fan of Jesus, but an Apostle, one of the twelve! Judas DID believe in Jesus, he DID leave his home and family to follow Jesus, he DID sacrifice, serve, and promote the work of Jesus. He DID witness countless mind-boggling miracles, including seeing Jesus walk on water, heal the sick, cure lepers, open blind eyes, and multiply bread to feed multitudes. Judas even witnessed, firsthand, Jesus do the most unimaginable, unbelievable thing of all: Raise the Dead! And yet despite all he saw and heard, all he was privileged to share in, he would betray the Son of God! What caused Judas to betray Jesus? How could he have seen so much and turned so far away? It is imperative for us to understand. And unless and until we do, we also run the risk of falling away from our Lord. And please don't think it can't happen, because it does, and I've seen it more times than I wish. Given the right circumstances and situations, any one of us, if not careful, could betray Jesus.

On the surface, it would appear that Judas' motivation was for the money. And it would be a nice, quick way to solve the mystery. It is true that Judas had a problem with money. Days before he had been appalled at what he saw as a 'waste' of ointment when Mary of Bethany

poured the costly perfume on Christ, symbolically and prophetically anointing Him for His burial. Matthew 26:6-13. He protested saying, "we could have sold it and given the money to the poor." St. John tells us in his gospel, chapter 12 verse 6, that Judas held the purse, helped himself to it, and was a thief. And, of course, the scriptures say, "the love of money is the root of all evil. 1 Timothy 6:10. But the truth is much more than meets the eye. After all, he tried to return the coins. Matthew 27:3. And 30 silver coins were not as valuable as one would think. Today's value would be approximately three hundred dollars - a small price for the life of Christ! The problem with Judas, the underlying causation of his betrayal of Jesus, is also the problem many people have with Jesus today. And perhaps never before is it so important to realize than today, in this dark and dismal moment in our history.

Judas didn't like God's plan, he didn't like what God was doing, and/or not doing. Judas couldn't accept that God was not doing things in a logical, reasonable way. God's ways did not make any sense to Judas; he couldn't and wouldn't accept God's will over his own. Judas thought he knew better than God. Judas couldn't see how suffering and sacrifice was useful. He didn't want a humble, meek messiah, but a powerful, political messiah. He couldn't see how God's kingdom would come by showing mercy, forgiving, and loving one's enemies. Judas, like most of our world today, wants all the blessings of God, but wants them on their own terms. We want to be healed of our sickness, (Covid-19), but we don't want to love our neighbors. We want prosperity, but don't want to share our bread with the hungry. We want to be forgiven, but don't want to forgive, and on and on.

The significance of Spy Wednesday is that it theologically reflects the daily struggles which we endure in our relationships with both God and neighbor. Perhaps, this year, more so than ever, Spy Wednesday should provide a period of reflection and introspective prayer, a time to examine our lives with painful honesty, and see the many times and ways that we, too, betray our Lord in our actions, behaviors, and deeds. If we do so honestly, we will ask, as did ALL the other 11 apostles, "Is it I, Lord?" Then, unlike Judas, we will turn to our merciful God in repentance, contrition, and a sincere and firm resolve to, "go and sin no more." The tragic tale of Judas teaches us much about God and ourselves. We see the reliability of scripture. There had been numerous prophecies going back hundreds of years predicting his betrayal (See Zechariah 11:12-14, Psalm 41:9). It shows us that God knew all that Judas would do long before it would occur. God was not blindsided by this betrayal, but rather, it was a part of His plan. His plan to

save mankind from sin required Christ to die, as the spotless Lamb of God. God therefore used Judas' betrayal to accomplish His plan of salvation for the entire world.

This should remind us also that God knew about this Global Pandemic long before anyone ever could. He saw it coming long before it escaped the horrific "Wet Markets" of Wuhan. He saw it moving long before it escaped out of China, crossed the seas and invaded the world. And He who holds all things in His hands sees when and how it will depart from us. On Spy Wednesday, Satan thought he was thwarting Gods plan by taking hold of Judas, but he was wrong. For God uses all things for good. He brings light out of darkness, and good from evil. This Spy Wednesday should remind us that even this pandemic can and will be used by God in powerful ways for greater good. No matter how illogical, unreasonable, or unimaginable it may seem, because God's plans for us are always good and not evil! Jeremiah 29:11.

May God bless and keep us all in His perfect peace,
Fr. Peter