

## Wednesday in Holy Week

Give us the power to comprehend O Lord, what are the breadth and length and height and depth, that we might know the love of Christ.  
Amen

Was he a villain to sell out his Master? Or was he just set up by his ambition and doomed for failure by the powers he could not control? Was he a zealot looking for the overthrow of Rome and the return to glory of Israel? Or was Judas Iscariot, just a victim of his own betrayal?

We know one thing surely; he was deeply loved by Master Jesus. Jesus has just finished demonstrating the depth of his love for his disciples by washing their feet – an act of servitude and humility. He urges that just as he has done for them after supper they likewise must show love one for another. The thought of being betrayed by one of his disciples is deeply disturbing. Jesus' troubled spirit is compounded by the knowledge that one of his family members will utterly poison himself.

Judas took his ministry seriously and was entrusted with the treasury. More than likely he was one of those who argued against the waste of costly perfume poured on Jesus' feet by Mary, so it might be sold and the money given to the poor. Judas had a social conscience. He wanted to do the greatest good. Yet that zealous desire for good got the better of him.

The only indication we have of his plotting to kill Jesus was his negotiations with the Chief priests. It makes us wonder whether the Chief priests were so afraid of the popularity of Jesus as a prophet that they would depend on Judas to create the infamous "Passover Plot." This poisonous hatred of pure love and righteousness would consume all it touched.

Did Judas truly have the inside track on the plot to assassinate Jesus of Nazareth? Did he know of the words of Caiaphas, the high priest, that prophesied that Jesus would be the one to die for the nation of Israel? It was likely he did. An APB was sent out by the ranking religious to arrest Jesus. A true Jew, a Jew loyal to Israel would turn this rebel into their custody. The appeal to patriotism would have swept up Judas, a man whose personality was aimed to please.

Was it also Judas' hope that Jesus' death would gather the dispersed people of God enabling the nation to stand against their Roman captors? Was Judas a victim of his own ambitions? Was he crushed when his Lord would not take the moral high ground to bring together worshipping Jews at the Passover that could create a powerful and formidable political base?

Again, we do not know the mind of this son of Simon Iscariot. We do know he betrayed Jesus. He was referred by the Christian community as the traitor. And we know that the betrayal of innocence was too much for even the politically savvy Judas.

Ironically, Jesus fed Judas before he was dismissed to do his deed. Ironically, from Jesus left, the second position of honor for seating in Jewish custom, Judas partook of this last supper, our Holy Eucharist. The bread that Jesus hallowed at that supper would become his broken body given for Judas and the whole world. The bread was dipped into the cup and given to Judas. And there at the holiest of moments, at our holy of holies, the mystery of evil's presence is manifest, almost simultaneously.

That last crumb of moral fiber that might have restrained Judas was gone. The honor of sitting just to the left of the seat of honor did not at all lead to Judas hesitation. This holy bread could have given him pause to say to himself, "No, no. I won't do it. I can't betray my Lord, especially now at the hour of his death." The father of traitors now empowered the trusted disciple to arrange for Jesus' ultimate sacrifice. Satan found in Judas a willing agent (cf. 8:44), who serves as a counterexample to Jesus, the willing agent of Yahweh his Father.

Thinking Judas was ordered to give alms to the poor, the disciples, even the beloved disciple who leaned at Jesus breast, were unsuspecting. Instead of giving to the poor as presumed he is selling out the archetypal Poor Man. In doing so he provides eternal wealth to the poor in spirit. The poor- all of us made beggars by sin may in some twisted way be grateful to Judas for his part in the drama that led to Jesus death.

Honestly, I have always felt sorry for Judas. I know what it's like to be a prodigal, to realize the error of my ways. By the grace of God and his mercy upon my soul may I always come back. Even at Jesus arrest, it was not too late for Judas. He recognized his betrayal. He might have returned, repented, and who knows what the power of God for good could have been accomplished through Judas life. How

sad! Jesus betrayed by one of his chosen. And it gives me pause to think that if I too am chosen to serve God, should I not walk carefully?

Let us pray: Eternal Father, this week we seek to discern the passion of your son Jesus whose intrepid march toward the cross strengthens us for our own death. In the midst of Jesus' rejection, suffering and death, we need the courage to face the lure of our own sin and the temptation of making your truth into our own image. Deliver us from the disaster of distancing ourselves from your love as did Judas. Remind us that except by your grace, and the vigilance of your Holy Spirit, we too may suffer the title of traitor. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. AMEN