

Reflection for Tuesday in Holy Week



The Last Supper - Painted by Juan de Juanes 1523-1529

John 13:21-28

While at supper with his disciples, Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, “I tell you most solemnly, one of you will betray me”. The disciples looked at one another, wondering which he meant. The disciple Jesus loved was reclining next to Jesus; Simon Peter said to him, “Ask who it is he means”, so leaning back on Jesus’ breast he said, “Who is it Lord”? Jesus replied, “It is the one to whom I will give the piece of bread I will dip into the dish”. He dipped the piece of bread and gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. At that instant, after Judas had taken the bread, Satan entered him.

In the picture of the last supper the artist portrays Jesus in that special moment of consecrating the Host, all the disciples are looking at the Host not at Christ, the artists way of accentuating the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Judas, who was revealed at the meal by Jesus as the one who would betray him to the authorities, is seated at the bottom right of the picture with a bag of money in his right hand. He is dressed in green and yellow, the colour of envy and is the only disciple without a halo. He looks ready to make a hasty exit from the scene.

The name Judas lives on, forever associated with mistrust and the act of betrayal but I have never been able to bring myself to condemn him wholeheartedly. There had to be a “Judas” in the life of Jesus in order for the prophesy of a betrayer to be fulfilled (Zech. 11:12-13). We could say Judas drew the short straw, it could have been anyone of the disciples but he, as the treasurer of the group, was the obvious choice.

As you look at the picture, think about Judas and why he did what he did. Was it just for the money, or was his motive designed to force Jesus as the Messiah into action, to stand up against those who felt threatened by him and wanted to get rid of him?

The sad thing about Judas is that he really loved Jesus, and in horror of what he had done he ran away and hanged himself without repenting and asking for forgiveness. For if he had, God would surely have forgiven him.

The story of Judas is a reminder to us all of the complexity of human nature. We are all capable of acts of compassion and kindness as much as acts of betrayal and selfishness. The choice is ours to decide our own path, to rejoice in the good and to repent and ask forgiveness for the bad.

I will leave you with words from a Bob Dylan song “With God on our side”, as told to me by John Grubb.

Through many a dark hour I’ve been thinkin’ about this
That Jesus Christ was betrayed by a kiss.
But I can’t think for you, You’ll have to decide
Whether Judas Iscariot had God on his side.

God bless you this Holy Week.

Reverend Irene