

Wednesday in Holy Week 2020 (A)

Summary: Dying to life

Traditionally today was called Spy Wednesday. And beyond the beauty of the Tenebrae it's all about Judas, who turned *Quisling* by spying on Jesus for the Temple authorities. Spying for most of us is something cinematically exotic – all martini's, fast cars and expense accounts - but my choosing Vidkun Quisling's name as a synonym for betrayal makes the reality of what Judas did stand in cold, stark relief.

How do you imagine Judas?

Perhaps what comes to mind is a sense of relief. "The disciples looked at one another, uncertain" who among them was the betrayer. "Lord, who is it?" one of them asks, but they all want to know. Their uncertainty and that question betray the possibility it could be anyone one of them. Peter and the others breathed a sigh of relief when Jesus gave the piece of bread to Judas because they were not responsible!

Looking at our own responsibility is much harder. When I was already a teenager when my uncle started his family. His oldest was about four when at a family party I found myself sat with a slice of cream cake on a teaplate. Up went my hand – the child doubtless hoping for a cartoonish moment of contact! Now, my upbringing was fairly traditional as far as discipline went and my schools practised corporal punishment. But there I saw something new – no slap on the legs – but an invitation to reflect. The child was asked to think of the effect of their actions – poor lamb, the tears of remorse...

I wonder how many of the disciples were secretly relieved that it was Judas who was the responsible one: for the Common Purse, for charitable disbursements, for the shopping. We all like the idea that someone else can take responsibility and let us off the hook. And they could continue to lounge with full stomachs and full glasses around the meal table as he left. A caricature of Judas leaves them free of responsibility.

Then, like a holographic picture 'Judas as betrayer' becomes something different – he becomes 'Judas the betrayed'. By refusing to see that there might be more to Judas than his betrayal of Jesus we refuse responsibility towards the whole person.

Judas' name appears in the four gospels 18 times. 9 times he is identified as a traitor, the one who betrays Jesus. And 9 times he is identified as a disciple, one of the twelve, one of the chosen.

How did Judas feel the day he was trusted enough to be chosen and numbered among the twelve? What did he feel when Jesus called his name? What were his hopes, and dreams? What excited him about Jesus's teaching? What projects was he trusted with that used the gifts he was given? What was the promise he sought and followed in Jesus? How did he usually respond to Jesus's trust? Some scholars have suggested that perhaps the reason Judas betrayed Jesus is because he wanted to force the Messiah's hand. Force Jesus into declaring the Kingdom of God and the end of Roman rule. Force the man who fed the thousands, healed the sick and raised the dead to create the new Jerusalem.

There are times when I feel I understand as much about our Lord Jesus as that version of Judas must have done.

Trust of some kind always comes with some sort of betrayal. You cannot betray unless you've first been given something to betray; love, friendship, trust, confidence, responsibility, a call. Jesus trusted Judas. He knew him to be a man full of light as well as shadow, and he loved him – I think that's why Judas couldn't live on after his betrayal. He couldn't live with the remorse, the responsibility of what he'd done.

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Spy Wednesday then is both an intensely personal affair between Jesus and Judas – and too about the intimate love of Jesus for us. Judas is an image of ourselves. We've all been entrusted with something and we all carry the risk that we might betray that entrusting. He holds before us the tension between trust and betrayal; a tension that lives within us, and a tension within which we live.

Don't forget that Judas's feet were washed just like the feet of the other disciples. He was loved by Jesus with the same love as were the others. With all the complexities and contradictions of his life he had a seat at the table with Jesus, as do we. Today's Eucharist, every eucharist, is about love and betrayal because to authentically love always risks betrayal. Real love gives itself and risks being dropped, badly carried, forgotten.

Today's it's Judas. In the courtyard it'll be Peter. At a different time, different place, in different circumstances it will be me, or you. Judas is not a then a Quisling but the mirror of our betrayals.

With what then have you been entrusted? What does that tension look like in your life? Look at the people, relationships, and opportunities in your life. Look at your values and beliefs, hopes, and dreams. What gifts and promises have been given you? In what ways are they calling to you? What are they asking of you? And how are you responding?

Don't make this into a judgment thing! Good or bad, right or wrong; just recognize the complexities and contradictions that constitute our lives, which constituted Judas' life. Rest it all in the gaze, the regard, the presence of Jesus on the Cross who takes ultimate responsibility.

One of the prayers I say at the vesting bench before coming to the altar is a prayer of St John Chrysostom, it's in his Divine Liturgy and in the lovely Romanian Orthodox Church in Timisoara I attended it was said by the whole congregation before they came up for Holy Communion.

Of thy Mystic Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant;
for I will not speak of thy Mystery to thine enemies, neither will I give thee a kiss as did Judas;
but like the thief will I confess thee: remember me, O Lord, in thy Kingdom.

Let us pray for the grace to be responsible for the full picture of our lives.

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