

Maundy Thursday
April 2, 2015
Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
of
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
John 13:1-15

We should not imagine that Judas was not responsible for his actions when we read in our Gospel tonight, “. . . when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot . . . to betray him.” What this shows us is not that Judas had no choice, but that the plot to kill the Son of God originated in the mind of Satan. Those who participated in that plot were, unwittingly or consciously, agents of the evil one. Free to choose otherwise, they cooperated with the devil to betray, torture, and kill Jesus, the innocent victim.

Satan’s role in this betrayal of Jesus is further fleshed out at the end of the chapter we heard from today. At the end of chapter 13 Judas receives Holy Communion from Jesus and then immediately leaves the Last Supper, at which both the priesthood and the Eucharist had been instituted. But instead of being fortified with the graces that flow from these two sacraments, Judas, we learn, has Satan enter into him. Having received the sacraments unworthily, with the wrong disposition, we see he has eaten and drunk judgment upon himself. As St. Paul tells us later on in the same chapter from which we just heard, “That is why some of you are ill and some have died.” Judas is the first man to receive Holy Communion unworthily and the first to suffer for it.

Recall what happened to Judas after he began of his own volition to cooperate with Satan and at the same time attempted to partake of holy things. Though he felt remorse and attempted to give back the thirty pieces of silver he earned for betraying Jesus, he did not at the same time have faith in the possibility of forgiveness. In his despair he killed himself, and the Book of Acts tells us that the place of his death was Akeldama, the Field of Blood.

The Field of Blood was located in the Hinnom Valley, the place Jesus referred to as Gehenna, a word that was also interpreted to mean hell. It was in the Hinnom Valley that apostate Jews sacrificed their children to the pagan deity, Moloch. Adopting the practices of their Canaanite neighbors, they burned their children to death by placing them in the arms of an idol whose stomach was a furnace of fire.

So the end of Judas came to be in a place Jesus compared to hell, a place so horrific its name was interchangeable with the word, “hell.” The money Judas earned was used to buy the field the Jewish authorities designated for the burial of foreigners. So Judas died alienated not only from Jesus and the rest of the disciples; he died alienated also from those who conspired with him to kill Jesus. Though he had done the devil’s bidding, even those also in the devil’s employ wanted nothing to do with him. In hell there is no communion, even among those similarly committed to advancing Satan’s purpose. There truly is no honor among thieves.

Now contrast the depressing alienation that the devil orchestrated with the beautiful communion that Jesus initiated through His sacrifice and then fosters through the gift of the sacraments whose institution we celebrate this evening. Those disciples who received their ordination and Holy Communion with the correct disposition are told by Jesus, “He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over.” The disciples were bathed in the Blood of the Lamb, and the

graces they received from the Sacraments would enable the eleven to follow in the path Jesus showed them.

Of course, they stumbled first. Though they had been fortified by grace, their fear led each of the eleven to abandon Jesus in His time of trial. After the Resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, their faith would be strong enough that they could be obedient to Jesus' command he gave them at the Last Supper: "You also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." Every one of the eleven laid down his life for the Church. The example Jesus gave them was not in vain, for they shared the correct disposition, that their wills be united to the will of the Father.

That unity of purpose has its expression in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, wherein we are united simultaneously to God in Jesus Christ and all those who have made the same pledge to follow His example, those who have partaken of His Body and Blood. That is, when we don't insist on our own wills, as Judas did, when we devote ourselves to the service of others and turn to Jesus for the strength to do so, we find ourselves in the company of innumerable disciples who desire and do the same thing. We are never alone, even in those times that the enemies of Christ may be successful in separating us physically from other disciples. We are united through the Body and Blood of Christ to everyone in every age who has received our Lord with a pure and contrite heart. And we look forward at the same time to when we will enjoy that Communion face to face with all those who have gone before us.

We must wonder what could lead one to make the choice that Judas did, to cooperate with Satan in the pursuit of death. How do we avoid making the same choice? We do so by having before our gaze at all times the long view. Satan uses our natural tendency to avoid pain and pursue pleasure against us. Before Judas took Holy Communion unworthily he had just heard Jesus tell him how the disciples of Christ are called to a lifetime of washing feet. Judas already had the thirty pieces of silver in his pocket, so it looked to him like he was the wise one: he wouldn't wash feet and he had money to boot. In the short view he was avoiding pain and achieving pleasure. He was so focused on the now that he neglected eternity.

This isn't what Jesus did, nor what we are called to do. Tonight, after all, is the night Jesus suffered his agony in the garden, where He was so troubled he actually prayed that this cup would pass from Him. But His devotion to the Father's will was such that He gladly suffered temporarily so that He'd have bliss eternally. It is this devotion to the will of the Father that will keep us in the long view, in the eternal perspective. With this eternal perspective we can be sure we won't be fooled when our adversary offers us temporary pleasure for eternal suffering, temporary companionship for eternal loneliness. If our goal is unity with God's will, it is eternal communion we seek in everything we do, not least of all our pledge we make, whenever we receive His Body and Blood, to suffer with Him. And if we suffer with Him now, so will we rise with Him forever.