

The love of Jesus for Judas

The Last Supper is full of intimacy. We see the “beloved” disciple, in all likelihood the youngest of the invitees, reclining naturally and unselfconsciously on the chest of Jesus. By this time, under the tutelage of Jesus, firm bonds of friendship have been forged within the fraternity of the apostles. Three years have passed since they found themselves in a group called apart by a charismatic prophet from Nazareth....three years of travelling together, sleeping under the stars at times, experiencing both hospitality and hostility, plenty and little, arguments and reconciliations between themselves. They all know that only someone with the spirit of Jesus could have bonded their disparate characters together. Jesus has shown them by example how to share, lose, give and forgive.....how to be a family! They are still unpolished diamonds but they have made strides in learning when to speak and when to be still and listen. They still have their ego issues but they have not lacked instruction in the ways of humility. When Jesus got up after washing their feet they were left to reflect on something He'd impressed on them from the beginning of their journey together.....serve each other and put the other's interests first. The kingdom they'd been taught about was all about love and everything else was pure commentary.

So Jesus confesses to them, as you would among close friends, that he is “*troubled in spirit*” (Jn 13.21). He announces this because he senses the bonds of intimacy and trust within the group are about to be broken by a single withdrawal. Judas was soon to leave the table of fellowship and disappear into the night.....to depart from the Light inside and enter into the darkness outside...to leave the shepherd and lose his way.

Who was Judas to Jesus? Possibly the brightest of the group, highly analytical....perhaps the one with the driest wit whose turn of phrase made Jesus laugh the most. Jesus loved Judas....cared deeply for him, valued his friendship. Even when the moment of betrayal arrives a few hours after the supper, Jesus gently questions Judas whether he really wants to do this. As the posse with swords and clubs gather around him, and Judas inflicts the kind of devastating wound that only friends can give, Jesus still looks into the eyes of Judas and calls him “friend.” It's a breath-taking moment.

Where does friendship end for you? At betrayal? It did not for Jesus. Though saddened to his core by Judas's infidelity, Jesus does not withdraw his friendship. He still meets the eyes of Judas and calls him “friend.” What a huge lesson for us! When we have been wounded, betrayed, the instinctive reaction is to step back....to cut ties....to break contact. Jesus on the cross says “go deeper!” Reflect on your own failings in friendship, your own omissions and mistakes. Jesus loved Judas in his imperfections....in the mixed bag that Jesus always knew he offered.

Love is either unconditional.....or it disappears like shifting sand when a contrary wind blows its way. Can I learn to be loving again towards someone who I've written off from my past.....who has hurt me more than I have been able to put into words? See Jesus looking into the eyes of Judas a few moments after confessing his soul was “*sorrowful even unto death*” (Mt 26.38)....then remind yourself of his kind greeting to the man called Judas Iscariot. Gospel homework for us all.

United with you in our prayers

Fr Simon