

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Apr 16th 2014

Every year, no matter how much or little I have embraced the Lenten Season and the practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, I am stopped short when we arrive at Holy Week and specifically, the story of Judas. I am not surprised necessarily that Judas betrayed Jesus because I can relate to that. I have in my own way turned away from God at different times in my life, separating myself from God. What stops me short, is that Jesus knew he was going to be betrayed and that Judas was the one who would betray him, and Jesus still washed Judas' feet at the gathering for Passover.

I have entered into this story many times, putting myself in the scene mostly as a bystander, sometimes having my feet washed, but never as Judas. I wonder what it was like for Jesus to wash the feet of Judas and for Judas to have his feet washed knowing that he was about to turn his friend and teacher over to the authorities. I wonder if Jesus took extra care when he washed Judas' feet.

I recently led a retreat on forgiveness. For the retreat, I focused on wisdom gained from Henri Nouwen's book "The Return of the Prodigal Son" and I also reread the "The Shack" by Wm. Paul Young. I came away with a few reminders. First, God is "especially fond of each of us." God loves us uniquely and unconditionally, even the Judas's of the world and even when we are Judas ourselves. Secondly, we are called to do the same. We are called to love each person uniquely and unconditionally, even those who hurt or betray us. And lastly, when we ourselves turn away from God, we have a choice. We can choose despair and death, as Judas did or we can choose life and return to God with tears, sorrow and repentance and be embraced by the one who loves us unconditionally as Peter did after he denied Jesus on Good Friday. In John 21 a resurrection story, Peter leapt out of the boat to reach Jesus on the beach and then walked with him down the beach where they had a very intimate reconciliation and conversation.

As we begin this most sacred time of the liturgical year, I invite you to reflect on Judas.

Who are the Judases in your life? Can you love them as Jesus loves Judas? Can you wash their feet?

How/when have you been Judas and turned your back on God? Are you able to return and allow Jesus to wash your feet and accept your unique belovedness?

May these Holy Days be filled with graces for all of us.

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