

Judas and the Loss of Hope

Each of the Passion narratives, all four of them, has unique aspects. I want to briefly talk about three aspects that are unique to the Gospel of Matthew's account and use it as a short examination of where we sit in terms of this reading: where my heart is, and what character I kind of occupy in this. Because there are less adequate characters and more adequate characters, just as our heart can be more or less adequate for what the Lord has done for us.

The first passage that's unique to Matthew is actually Judas's sense of sorrow for what he has done and his returning of the silver. This doesn't exist in the other three Gospels. In this, I want us to examine ourselves not in terms of, "How have I betrayed Christ?" Not at all. That's not helpful. Rather, what I think is helpful to analyze within Judas is his psychology after the fact. I believe that a lot of us, in some places, can move into this type of stance before God in different ways in our life, and it isn't helpful.

The problem with Judas, primarily, at the bottom of things, is that he's sorry for what he did, but he doesn't believe that mercy is possible. He's sorry for what he did, but he doesn't believe that mercy is possible.

Judas didn't just snap. It was probably kind of a long slide. And especially, the Church Fathers would say, he was frustrated that God wasn't doing things the way they were supposed to be done. He was frustrated that the Messiah was not acting like he thought the Messiah should act.

We too should examine our hearts to say whether we really trust in God, whether we really trust in His mercy. If there's an area of our heart where we think God just can't do anything with this, or this can't be healed—any area where we have kind of lost hope in resurrection, grace, and mercy—we need to repent of that and to re-put our trust in God and His infinite mercy.

Passivity, Compromise, and the Need to Act

The second character that's unique to Matthew's Gospel is Pilate's wife. This recounting of her dream and her coming before her husband to try to dissuade him is unique also to Matthew's Gospel. She obviously had some sort of conviction and revelation from the Lord that was trying to encourage Pilate not to do this thing.

Now, she's actually a saint in the Eastern tradition. She goes by the name Claudia Procula. But I think we could say—not knowing all the details, at least just on the surface reading of the text—that she didn't really do a lot. She brought to her husband this kind of revelation she had, but she left it at that.

Where I think we can apply that to our own hearts is really having to do with marriage and family life. It may be that you've had an inspiration or conviction that there's some priority within the family that maybe is not really honoring the Lord the way it should. Maybe it's been brought up, but this might be a place of our heart that's too passive, where we know what the Lord wants, but instead of leaning into that and becoming active in pursuing priorities that really honor the Lord, there might be places of our family life—whether you're a family of one or ten—where you've been convicted, but passive. We have not actually taken initiative to follow through on that inspiration the Lord gave to us.

The third set of characters that's unique to Matthew's Gospel, in a sense, is the guard. It doesn't come up within the Gospel today. It comes up about ten verses later, actually within the Resurrection narrative. What happens in that narrative is the guards are present when the angel comes down, blasts away the stone, and sits on it, then announces to the women gathered that Jesus is alive. Then they go back and report the whole thing, and they get bribed. They accept a bribe to cover up what had happened.

This I see as an examination of any part of our hearts that is still very worldly: any part of our hearts that has compromised, that is not witnessing to the resurrection power of the Lord; any place of our heart where greed for wealth, success, or pleasure has really hardened us from being able to live into the Gospel graces and to witness to the saving power of the Gospel.

It's possible that in different parts of our life we've been all three. We haven't lived in hope. We have been too passive within setting priorities that will honor the Lord. And perhaps in places, we've been compromised.

At the end of the day, what's true is that all of us are Barabbas. Barabbas ironically means "son of the father." All of us are beloved children of God, and the Lord has taken our place in terms of the punishment that we deserve because of our rebelliousness.

And that line that the people speak, that you spoke—"May His blood be upon us and our children"—cuts two ways. It is both the recognition that His blood is upon us because of our rebelliousness that necessitated the Crucifixion, but also the marvelous truth that His blood is upon us to wash away our sins and to reconcile us to the Father. That is where our hope lies: in His infinite love and mercy.

More Adequate Responses

Just to close, there are three characters that I think parallel the three I just named, who show a slightly more adequate response that we might take to heart in terms of our own journey.

Peter contrasts with Judas because, although Peter betrayed the Lord, he reconciles with the Lord. He trusts that he can be forgiven.

In terms of Claudia Procula, I think Joseph of Arimathea shows initiative and follow-through and takes an active role in ministering to the Lord.

Finally, the women who stay with the Lord at His burial show us this real contrast with the guards, in the sense of a kind of Holy Saturday hope: that somehow, by our love and by our following, just maybe the Lord's promises will be fulfilled in us if we sit at His feet.

So dear friends, as we come to celebrate Him in the Eucharist and to receive Him, let us ask for the grace of this Holy Week, that our hearts may be transformed to be more and more prepared to live in the Easter graces. Praise be Jesus Christ.