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* Knights of Malta *

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Chancellor's Update

“It is I” (Part 2)

...Is it I, Lord? But he answering, said: He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, he shall betray me. The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man shall be betrayed: it were better for him, if that man had not been born. And Judas that betrayed him, answering, said: Is it I, Rabbi? He saith to him: Thou hast said it. (Matthew 26:22-25)

As important as it is to notice the compassion Christ felt for the Eleven, it is perhaps more pressing to note how merciful He was to *Judas* in this discourse. Before we do this, however, we should immediately address the question of Judas' guilt. Recall that in the passages above, Jesus' answer to question of "Is it I?" was "he that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me." (Matt. 26:23). This is recorded in both Matthew and Mark's Gospels. Reading John's, however, we immediately see that after hearing this warning Judas was the only one to stretch out his hand and continue eating, for as it was written "...when [Jesus] had dipped the bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot." (John 13:26). Bede explains this brazen action as "That is, Judas, who when the others were sad and *held back* their hands, *puts forth* his hand with his Master into the dish. And because He had before said, 'One of you shall betray Me', and yet the traitor perseveres in his evil..." (C.A., vol. II, p.284, em. added). In addition, Saint Jerome notices a slight difference in Judas' response to the news of treachery from the other disciples. Matthew records that the eleven all respond, "Lord, is it I?", but Judas says, "*Master*, is it I?". Jerome observes that "his question feigns either great respect, or a hypocritical incredulousness. The rest who were not to betray Him, said only *Lord*; the actual traitor addresses Him as *Master*, as though it were some excuse that he denied Him as Lord, and betrayed a Master only." (C.A., vol. I, p.890). We can understand Judas' malice most simply by pondering this: when he was confronted with his sin face-to-face with the Living God, he lied.

So, knowing Judas was guilty of a great sin, how did Christ show him mercy in their final hours? There is a great consensus among the Fathers of the Church that one of the main reasons Jesus cast the charge upon all seated at the table was *to avoid incriminating Judas directly*. Bede explains it as, "And yet our Lord does not especially point him out, lest being so plainly detected, he might only become the more shameless. But He throws the charge on the whole twelve that the guilty one might be turned to repentance." (C.A., vol. III, p. 708). Pope Leo goes further to say, "[Jesus] shows that the conscience of His betrayer was known to Him, not meeting his wickedness with a harsh and open rebuke, that penitence might find a readier way to one who had not been

disgraced by public dismissal.” (C.A., vol. III, p.888). And most gently of all, Chrysostom kindly states, “I rather think that Christ did this out of regard for him, and to bring him to a better mind.” (Ibid). We can discover even more about Jesus’ intentions by looking at His response to Judas’ question, “Master, is it I?” for Christ said “Thou has said it” (C.A., vol. I, p.890). Remigius brilliantly exposes a tender mercy in Christ’s response by explaining it as “[His response] may be understood thus; ‘Thou sayest it, and thou sayest what is true’; or, ‘Thou hast said this, not I’; leaving him room for repentance so long as his villainy was not publicly exposed.” (Ibid). The curious reader might ask, however, “Why did Jesus so harshly rebuke him, then, saying it would have been better if Judas ‘had never been born’?” Theophylus easily explains this rebuke, considering Judas’ actions in the light of eternity. He says, “For as respects the end for which he was designed, it would have been better for him to have been born, if he had not been the betrayer, for God created him for good works; but after he had fallen into such dreadful wickedness, it would have been better for him never to have been born.” (C.A., vol. II, p. 285)

Considering these events at the Last Supper, the First Mass, we have learned much about Christ and the faithful eleven men who ate with Him. What can we then learn about our sins and ourselves? We should learn from Judas that no man should approach the Table of Christ with a heart of ill will. Through thirteen centuries of time, you can almost feel Bede’s grief as he writes “Woe too to that man, to-day and for ever, who comes to the Lord’s table with an evil intent. For he, after the example of Judas, betrays the Lord, not indeed to Jewish sinners, but to *his own sinning members*.” (Ibid. p. 284, em. added). **Yet, we should learn from Christ’s mercy that the only time too late for repentance is after the moment of death.** Sadly, Judas’ guilt-ridden ears refused to hear this lesson. So too should our own mercy be to others, as Jesus “gives us an example, that even unto the end we should be employed in reclaiming sinners.” (*Augustine*, C.A., vol. III, p. 708). As for the Apostles, we should thoroughly learn from their humility. These men were ostensibly at the center of the Body of Christ, the Church, but even so close to heart of their Master, their fear of future sin was palpable. Origen remarks that “They remembered too, that, as men, before they were matured, their minds were liable to change, so as to form wishes the very opposite to what they might have had before.” (C.A., vol. IV, p.435) In other words, their hearts had changed once before and they could change again if they did not remember the words of Christ, that “he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved.” (Matt. 24:23). But should we choose to appeal to Christ’s mercy, to approach the Blessed Sacrament with a love that bears “fear and trembling,” (Phil. 2:12) and to remember that *no man* should live as if heaven is promised, then we too shall rise with Him, as He has risen, and joyfully hear the final sentence: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matt. 25:34) Amen.

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