

JUDAS
Palm Sunday, March 28, 2021
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There's nothing better in a good book, great movie or suspenseful TV show than a sinister villain... the one we love to hate, the one whom we want to see get his just deserts at the end, the one who makes us feel better when they are vanquished. There is Darth Vader in Star Wars, Voldemort in Harry Potter, Dracula or Norman Bates. And, of course, we have our real-life evil people like Hitler, Roman Emperor Nero or serial killer Ted Bundy. But, none of these come close to the ultimate betrayer, the super Benedict Arnold of the Bible and, arguably, of all time: Judas! To this day, we label those who do us wrong, saying, "You're a Judas!" But what drove Judas to betray Jesus? Was he merely a divine pawn in the Passion of Christ? Is Judas sentenced to hell for all of eternity? Is there anything that we can possibly learn from him to enhance our Christian faith?

Perhaps Judas wasn't all bad? After all, he was personally chosen by Jesus himself and abandoned all that he had to follow him. He spent

over *three years* with Jesus, right next to him let alone with the other 11 apostles. He was sent out on missionary work where he cast out demons and healed the sick. He heard with his own ears the Gospel of the Good News directly from the mouth of Christ. He witnessed miracle after miracle. He was chosen by his brothers to hold the groups' money bag... you don't do that with someone you don't trust. He was one of *the* 12. *No one* suspected Judas of treason... no one but Jesus.

So what happened... why did Judas sour on Jesus? Biblical scholars have many theories, some of them controversial. Judas was a common name in Judea but the Judas we talk of today was Judas Iscariot... meaning "man from Queriyot [query-yacht] which is a village in Hebron and may have been Judas' hometown... if so, he would be the only apostle who was not a native of Galilee. So, maybe he felt like the odd man out, not really part of the group. Some theologians believe that Judas was a member of the "Dagger Bearers," one of the most radical arms of the Zealots. Perhaps Judas became disillusioned

with Jesus' message of peace, forgiveness and love, and thought that he could force Jesus' many, many followers to revolt if Jesus was arrested. Still others think it was just plain ole' greed that led Judas to betray the Son of God. The truth is, we really do not know why Judas did what he did.

Both St. John and St. Luke tell us that the Evil One entered Judas (John 13:2, Luke 22:3) setting in motion the greatest betrayal of all time. This betrayal happened in two moments... Judas meets with the priests and scribes plotting and devising a way to trap Jesus... you would think Judas would be have been rewarded or paid handsomely by the temple officials but he receives 30 pieces of silver... equivalent to about \$20 today... If you think about that... the Son of Man is betrayed for \$20! It's important to note that Judas was not forced by God into the role that he chose for himself. Jesus treated him as a friend but his invitations to follow him on the path of righteousness did not force his free will or prevent him, obviously, from falling into Satan's temptations.

So, Judas is in hell, right? Again, we really don't know for sure. Scripture tells us that Judas regretted what he had done shortly after he did it... "I have betrayed an innocent man." He repented. He was remorseful. He felt guilty. However, and this is a BIG however, he did not seek forgiveness. We must not only be sorry when we sin but we must also seek forgiveness. After denying Jesus, St. Peter repented. Judas committed suicide. Judas felt sorry for what he did, just as Peter did. Peter wept. Judas returned the blood money. So, it's important to note that while Holy Mother Church canonizes saints and in doing so declares them to have entered into eternal glory, the Church does not declare someone – ANYONE – to be in hell... that severe judgement is reserved exclusively to God.

Judas does leave us who two very important lessons. The first, as Pope Benedict writes, "It is a mistake to think that the great privilege of living in the company of Jesus is enough to make a person holy." If Satan can turn Jesus' handpicked disciples how much more are we vulnerable? We must always be on guard against the Evil One least we

become a Judas in our own time. Secondly, when we sin, we must repent AND seek the forgiveness which is bought for us through Jesus' passion, crucifixion and resurrection.

Author Ray Pritchard sums up Jesus' betrayal this way... "One apostle was lost that none should presume. Eleven were saved that none should despair. In the end, most of us who call ourselves Christians will search our hearts and conclude that, yes, although we fail him in many ways, we do love Jesus and claim him as our Savior. The story of Judas is in the Bible for many reasons, not the least of which is that before we take anything for granted, we, at least, have to ask the question the other apostles asked that fateful night: 'Surely not I, Lord?'"