

In Nomine Iesu

“But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!” And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.” (Luke 22:21-23)

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.” (Luke 22:31-34)

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Second Adam. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus:

We continue in our series, “Witnesses to the Passion of Christ in the Gospel of St. Luke.” This evening our witnesses are Judas Iscariot and Simon Peter, two of the chosen twelve. In light of his name, which means “man of Kerioth,” a small city in southern Judah, Judas appears to be the only one of Jesus’ disciples not a Galilean. He was unknown to the others when he was chosen. Peter, on the other hand, lived in the same city as Jesus, Capernaum, together with James and John, and his brother Andrew, all of whom had known each other for years.

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Judas was entrusted with the finances of Jesus’ small band. Whenever they needed food or supplies, or gave to the poor, it was Judas who saw to it that the monies given them for those purposes were paid out. St. John, writing many years later, tells us that Judas was a thief, and stole from the money bag. In fact, Judas became upset when, just a few days before Jesus’ betrayal, a woman poured expensive oil on Jesus’ feet. Judas voiced the opinion that it should have been sold for 300 denarii and the money given to him as treasurer for distribution to the poor. This would have been a substantial sum of money, since a denarius was the wage paid to a laborer for a day’s work. It would have been a tempting sum for a thief.

Was it so simple that Judas betrayed Jesus to the Jewish Council for 30 shekels of silver, a sum worth about the same as the 300 denarii that just slipped through his fingers? We will never know. But it is clear that Judas was a dishonest man. He abused his position. And he deceived himself regarding Jesus. And so, he ended up carrying not just the weight of the money bag, but the far greater weight of his guilty conscience. Judas had given in to temptation often, and sought no release from the guilt. He neither confessed his sins nor sought God’s mercy. He did not know the peace of sins forgiven. So, he was easy prey to still greater temptation, still greater sin. He stands as a horrific example to us all of the danger of carrying within us unresolved sin. Because sin unforgiven, as God’s word teaches, leads to more sin. It never goes away by itself. Satan, whose name means Accuser, used greedy Judas’ guilt to lead him to crafty Caiaphas. And so, the bargain was struck. The Son of Man would be betrayed.

II

Jesus knew what was coming as He sat in the upper room, and instituted the Lord’s Supper, John tells us He said, “I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.’ Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He.” (John 13:18-19) The disciples were troubled, but did not grasp the significance of the phrase that Jesus quoted from Psalm 41. “What is this about a heel being raised against our Lord?” But they did understand that the Master said one of them would betray Him. And they began asking who would do such a thing. Peter, who evidently sat farther down the table from Jesus, was so troubled that he motioned to John, the youngest, who sat at Jesus’ one side, while Judas sat at the other. John, grasping Peter’s meaning, turned to Jesus and asked, “Lord, who is it?” You remember what Jesus answered, and what He did. John wrote years later that none of them

grasped what had happened at that moment - even John who sat next to Jesus and asked the question. They all thought Jesus told Judas to go out and purchase some necessary thing or other as he had so often in the past. No one realized that at that moment Judas was about to set in motion the greatest betrayal in human history, **a great evil** that the Father would turn into the **greatest good** the world would ever know.

Uncertainty and fear gripped each of the twelve. If Judas saw the gathering storm clouds sooner than the rest, it was only because he was the cleverest of the twelve. He had schemed his way this far. He would do so again, he thought. He would end up on the winning side. Peter too saw trouble coming, just as he had when he argued with Jesus about His going to Jerusalem to die, for which the Lord admonished him, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." (Matthew 16:23)

Here again, Peter tried to save Jesus' ministry. Who is the betrayer? It surely cannot be me. I will never leave You. Even if I have to die. Who is the betrayer? And so, temptation would come to Peter that night too. Peter sought to lead, to do what was necessary, to do what he thought would work. He drew his sword in the garden to defend his Master, not seeing that by it he too was doing evil to the very One he sought to help. After that Peter followed to the high priest's home and watched helplessly as Jesus was condemned. There, as his hopes and dreams came crashing down all around him and **pure evil arose** from the depths of hell and cast its grim shadow on all, Peter was questioned. Once, twice, three times he denied knowing Jesus. He cursed. He swore he didn't know this Galilean – and **then the rooster crowed**.

All betrayed Jesus that night. All fled in fear and unbelief. Peter, the bold leader of the twelve, fell spectacularly to Satan's temptation. It turned out just as Jesus had said to those who arrested Him, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But **this is your hour and power of darkness**." (Luke 22:52-53) Indeed it was. The power of darkness, the evil one, had entered Judas with the taking of bread from the Master's hand, and now inspired his every move, Satan saw victory within his grasp. He rejoiced as he worked in and through Judas, working as the heel rising up to crush the promised Savior. How he must have laughed as he thought of Eve and the first promise. Satan urged Judas along in excited anticipation, longing to hurl the words God had spoken in the garden back into His face: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." (Genesis 3:15)

The heel was raised, ready to crush. The disciples fled in fear. Peter, the rock, had crumbled under Satan's masterful assault. Judas had become the instrument of his Master's destruction. Caiaphas, the high priest of God – the High Priest of God! - was congratulating himself for his brilliance as he prepared to sacrifice One to save the nation, and so become himself the nation's savior! And the Son of Man, the so-called Second Adam, stood alone, mocked and condemned. God's chosen people were about to choose the thief and murderer Barabbas over Jesus. The heel indeed had begun to descend ... but, as Satan would learn when the sun went dark the next day, **it would descend on him**. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria