

Holy Wednesday

March 19, 2008

Gospel

John 13:21-32

At supper with his friends, Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples-- the one whom Jesus loved-- was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once."

Companionship and Betrayal

Betrayal is only possible by a close companion. An enemy does not betray us because an enemy never had our trust to begin with. But a friend is trusted, near to us, breaks bread with us. In fact, this is literally what com-pan-ion means: a person that we share bread with. If you have ever experienced betrayal, it is particularly painful to discover that your trusted companion is selling out the relationship you hold dear.

Jesus knows that someone close to him will betray him, and if he is as human as you or me, it must be painful. He shares his pain with his disciples, but he does not tell them who it is. He does not reject the betrayer from his table. Then, when the beloved disciple asks who it is, he reveals who will betray him by sharing a piece of bread with him. Jesus acts out the very definition of companion with the one who will hand him over to the authorities. It is a strange way to reveal the rat among friends.

I think Jesus means for us to realize that he never rejects Judas. Judas is going to the authorities to settle the logistics for their Thursday night capture of Jesus, and still Jesus does not condemn him. In our own lives, if we found out about the betrayal before it even happened, I think we would try to protect ourselves. We would distance ourselves from this companion who is about to poison our bread. But Jesus never distances himself from anyone, even if they are about to crucify him, he continues to share bread with them.

This is what Jesus does with us at the altar each time that we approach and share the bread and wine of his offering. Jesus is making us his companions by sharing bread with us throughout the centuries. We may not want to admit it, but in many instances we are more like Judas than the beloved disciple. We take the bread and wine, and leave to go do what we are going to do. We have many ways to betray the

relationship with Christ that is freely given to us at the altar without question, without confrontation. This is why excommunication is so theologically fraught with difficulty. If Jesus would not even excommunicate Judas, what right does the church have to excommunicate even the most notorious sinners in the Christian community? We all take the body and blood of our Lord, call ourselves his companion, and then walk out into the world challenged to maintain our faithfulness to that relationship. Do we see the Christ in every face that we meet? Do we love our neighbor? Do we care for the sick and suffering? Do we visit those in prison? In every generation we have our own way to turn our backs on the relationship the Jesus offers us at his table. The good news for us is that Jesus never stops offering to share bread with us, even when he knows that we will betray him. Jesus chooses companionship at all cost. He knows that God will be glorified no matter how badly we treat his Son.