

John 13, 21-32

31st March 2021

Wednesday of Holy Week

May I speak in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Our gospel reading today occurs immediately after Jesus has washed his disciples' feet and explained the reason for His actions. Then Jesus is troubled, again. Isaiah 53 v 3 tells us Jesus is "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

Jesus tells His disciples that one of them will betray Him, and they are stunned. Now we know that disciples have been with Jesus and each other for 3 years, day and night, staying in one place or travelling around, and for all this close association, none of the disciples recognized the true Judas. He walked, talked and acted like a disciple so convincingly that Jesus alone knew his heart. This is a very good example of evil, it can be right under our nose and we never notice it. The King James Version of Genesis 3 v 1 tells us "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made."

When asked who will betray Him, Jesus says in v 26 "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish", Jesus gives the bread to Judas, Judas leaves, and the rest of the disciples look from one to another totally dumbfounded, "Has Judas gone to buy provisions? Has Judas just nipped out to make a donation to charity?"

Let's look closely at this passage because it tells us something vital about the nature of evil.

Jesus predicts what is going to happen, v 26

Jesus demonstrates what is going to happen – he gives Judas the bread

Immediately afterwards, giving the disciples no chance to forget what has just been said, in v. 27 "As soon as Judas took the bread, satan entered into him." And those who have been in constant, daily, close

contact with Jesus Himself, have absolutely no idea what has just happened, despite being told, and despite witnessing what they had just been told. Their spiritual eyes were blind. That's an observation, not a criticism.

When we chat about current or past events, we always assume "someone must have known." Someone must have known, about Jimmy Saville, about Dr, Harold Shipman, about Fred West.

And here we see the disciples witnessing Judas leaving the building and having no idea where he has gone, or why. They think he must be about to do something he has done before, like shop, maybe.

The disciples witness an act of evil, but they do not see a thing. Again, an observation, not a criticism. His disciples were with Jesus when He performed His deliverance miracles, and cast evil spirits out of people. They had personally witnessed evil leaving a person – they had never before witnessed evil entering a person. It may be that there is no difference as far as our physical eyes can see.

Back to Judas for a minute. V. 30 "So. After receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out AND IT WAS NIGHT. John 8, 12 tells us Jesus is the Light of the World. Judas has just turned away from Jesus, the Light of the World, so everywhere he walked after that he walked in darkness.

The awareness of evil need not make us afraid, Every time we say The Lord's Prayer, we pray "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" We may find it helpful to liken evil to bacteria, we know bacteria exist although individual ones cannot be seen by the naked eye, we know some bacteria could make us very ill, so we employ good hygiene practices and maintain them, being aware of the risks rather than becoming anxious because of them.

It never hurts to put on the full armour of God mentioned in Ephesians 6, v 13-17, because we – and all believers of every denomination – are involved in a war of good v. evil. The only battle we CANNOT win is a battle we do not know we are fighting. The

enemy cannot touch Jesus, so he attacks those whom Jesus loves. And that is us.

This is getting really heavy. As Mad-Eye Moody in Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire says, “Constant vigilance!”

Notice that Jesus is in complete control even though the accuser was about to use Judas for his own purposes. Evil was unable to make a move with permission from God the Father and God the Son, for the greater glory of God and for the salvation of mankind. The disciples were unaware – partly – because it was necessary for God’s plan of salvation. Imagine eleven angry men knocking Judas to the ground to prevent him betraying Jesus.... eleven on one, it is possible Judas could have been killed and then one or more of the disciples would have been arrested and put to death for murder which would have reduced the number of people available to preach the gospel. And the following chaos would have lengthened the time Jesus had to agonise over facing crucifixion, He was under such stress that He sweated blood, remember.

The last 2 verses of our gospel reading tell of God’s glory, Jesus says, “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify Him at once.” God the Father and God the Son pass glory from one to another. Jesus glorifies God by His obedience to Him, Philippians 2, 8 tells us “becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.” And God glorifies His Only Son by proclaiming in Philippians 2, 10 “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Glorious. But not easy, and far from pleasant, Jesus’ obedience to Our Father involved fear, agony, blood and death. Mercifully, we are not asked to do the same.

What does God expect from us? Micah 6, 8 tells us “He has shown you, O Mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Simple but necessarily easy. Walking humbly with God involves putting His will above ours, when we would prefer to have our own way. Jesus knows how that feels.

God knows our frame and remembers we are dust, Psalm 103, v.14. Whatever He is asking of us personally, He knows we need help, but we can do it. Philippians 4, 13 tells us “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

This Holy Week let us follow Jesus to the cross, and walk on humbly with God for the rest of our days, so that when we stand before Him He will look at us and say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Amen.