

Short address for Wednesday in Holy Week

John 13 v 21 -32 Jesus identifies who will betray Him

Judas has been condemned throughout history as the man who betrayed Jesus. But before we condemn him too much we need to understand that popular thought at the time was that Judas Iscariot was a member of the Sicarii which was a band of assassins among Jewish rebels, intent on driving the Romans out of Judea. They could well have been the people who attacked the man on the road to from Jerusalem to Jericho which we know as the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus chose this man despite his very dubious connections and must have known that at heart he had been capable of ruthless killing. He was also trusted enough to be the keeper of disciple's kitty although we hear that he pilfered it. He must have been especially chosen and known what he had to do. He made no effort to refuse the "dipped bread" and the other disciples did not appear to find anything odd in this act, believing he had gone to buy what they needed for the festival or to give something to the poor.

Despite his notorious role in the Gospel narratives, Judas remains a controversial figure in Christian history. For instance, Judas' betrayal is seen as setting in motion the events that led to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection which, according to traditional Christian theology, brought salvation to humanity. Gnostic texts - rejected by the mainstream Church as heretical - praise Judas for his role in triggering humanity's salvation and view Judas as the best of the apostles.

St Luke tells us that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day. (Luke 24 v1). Judas is vilified by history, but if we believe St Luke then somebody had to betray Jesus. If it was God's plan that Jesus should be crucified, it is not hard to surmise that Judas was part of that plan.

We will never know but next time we are minded to react to somebody's actions and see them as "a Judas" perhaps we should stop and accept we never know the full story and perhaps wonder if it is not part of some bigger plan.

The cross is central to our faith: where Jesus died for our sins.

As George Bennard wrote in his famous hymn:

*In the old rugged Cross, stain'd with blood so divine
A wondrous beauty I see
For the dear Lamb of God, left his Glory above
To pardon and sanctify me*