

THE BETRAYAL

Isaiah 50. 4-9a

John 13. 21-32

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

The scene that we have before us in chapter 13 of St John's gospel is a very intimate one indeed. Our Lord and his twelve disciples have just shared the Passover meal; and Jesus has just shown his disciples an astonishing example of humility, service and love by washing their feet. Christ and his twelve leaders are now sitting on cushions or couches on the floor; they are reclining on their left sides; and the Beloved Disciple is reclining next to our Lord (figuratively 'at his bosom').

Jesus suddenly is troubled, and announces that one of the disciples present at the meal is to betray him. When asked by the disciples to identify the betrayer, Christ says that he will dip a piece of bread in a dish and give it to the traitor. This gesture of dipping bread and offering it to a guest was a special sign of hospitality in the Near East. A host normally did it to show respect and to confer particular honour on an invitee, who was to be considered above all others. It is this gesture that our Lord now executes; and the recipient of that gesture is Judas Iscariot.

At that very moment, we are told that Satan entered Judas; and as a result of this, Judas deserts and abandons the community of love and intimate friendship that is represented in the Upper Room. Judas literally allows himself to be possessed by the devil. As we read this, we realise that the critical players in the betrayal are now Jesus and the devil, and not Jesus and Judas. Unlike the other gospels, the gospel of John has, up until this point, narrated no stories of exorcisms in Christ's ministry. The battle with demonic forces and evil is saved for the consummate battle of our Lord's own hour. It is crucial for us to note that even in this consummate battle, Satan's

work is *framed by Jesus's initiative*. Christ offers the food to Judas and instructs him to proceed quickly. Almost ironically, Judas (now possessed by Satan) executes our Lord's instructions. He obeys him and leaves immediately, fulfilling Jesus's urging for haste. Christ remains in full control of the events of his hour.

The other eleven disciples do not understand what is happening. They do not see that the betrayal is starting, even now at this very moment; and they certainly do not understand the full scope of the cosmic dimensions of the betrayal.

Our passage finishes with the words, 'and it was night'. This notation has many layers of meaning. Firstly, this notation underscores the truth of Judas's identity. By removing himself from our Lord, he has demonstrated that he loves the darkness more than the light; and so cuts himself off from Jesus's offer of life. Secondly, this notation signals that Judas's actions usher in the time that will bring Christ's presence as the Light of the world to a close. And lastly, this notation reminds us of the truth that was proclaimed by St John in the very first chapter of his gospel: 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it' (1. 5).

Amen.