

A HOMILY FOR HOLY WEDNESDAY: LOVE, AND BETRAYAL

John 13. 21-32

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

It is the Last Supper. Our Lord is troubled in spirit. He has washed the disciples' feet: everyone's, including those of Judas. 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me', says Jesus. We hear those words and (with the knowledge of history) look at Judas. When the disciples heard those words, however, they 'looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking'. Their uncertainty betrays the possibility that it could have been any one of them.

Christ knows that he will be betrayed. He knows who will do it, and he knows when it will happen. So does Judas. Our Lord is neither surprised nor caught off guard. Nor is Judas. They both know and they both know that the other knows. The only ones who do not know, the only ones who are surprised, are the other disciples.

Tonight's Supper is one of love and betrayal. The two always exist side by side. To deny that we can (and do) betray Jesus in some way denies that we are loved by Jesus or that Jesus has given himself over to us. We can only 'betray' those who have given themselves over to us in love. We cannot 'hand over' that which has not first been handed over to us. Authentic love always risks betrayal.

In giving Judas the bread, Christ 'hands himself over' in love to Judas. Our Lord makes himself 'betrayable'. We who live in the modern West forget that 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 Jesus now executes; and the recipient of that gesture is Judas Iscariot.

I suspect that the other disciples (and we?) are relieved when the bread is dipped and given to Judas. So it's Judas, is it? He's the traitor, then. So he's the one to blame. Judas makes it easier for us to not look at ourselves. But the truth is that we have all been given the bread of Jesus's life. And like honoured guests, we have all been washed (not just our feet) in the (baptismal) water of his love.

Yes, tonight it is Judas. Soon, at the Cross, it will be Peter. At different times, in different places and in different circumstances, it will be someone else. Judas is not so much the culprit as he is the mirror of our (collective and individual) betrayals. And when we engage in such betrayal, it is not simply Christ and his love that we betray. We betray ourselves. Every betrayal of our Lord betrays ourselves. We hand ourselves over to the night, betraying our life to death, our love to self-interest and our hope to despair. Every time we turn away from the Light, the source of our life, Jesus is troubled in spirit once again. Why? Because he continues to love us, in spite of our repeated betrayals of him.

We, the betrayers, have the amazing privilege of re-enacting the Last Supper this evening in the Mass. We, the betrayers, have surprisingly and undeservedly been forgiven, accepted and invited to re-join the trinitarian circle of Divine Love that surrounds us. That Divine Love calls us 'Son' and 'Daughter' (rather than 'Betrayer').

It was St John Chrysostom who wrote: 'Of thy Mystic Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant; for I will not speak of thy Mystery to thine enemies, neither will I give thee a kiss as did Judas; but like the thief will I confess thee: Remember me, O Lord, in thy Kingdom. Amen.'