



Not for sale

Pencil Preaching for Wednesday, April 8, 2020

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“What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” (Matthew 26:14)

Isa 50:4-9a; Ps 69; Matt 26:14-25

The Lectionary during Holy Week lays out the treasured “Songs of the Servant” found in Isaiah and the psalms that echo their themes regarding a mysterious figure whose persecution and death are revealed as expiation for the sins of the people. It is evident that the evangelists composed their

Passion narratives to indicate that Jesus fulfilled these heart-breaking texts during his final days on earth.

Today’s Gospel repeats Sunday’s Gospel about the betrayal by Judas at the Last Supper, where it unfolds in poignant detail. Jesus is fully aware that Judas has already plotted with the chief priests to hand him over. Aside from its small monetary value, the blood money he received was the price of a slave, though the real cost was incalculable because Judas was Jesus’ friend.

That Judas was at the Last Supper at all only adds to the pathos. By sharing in the dish with Jesus he fulfills Psalm 49:9: “Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.” To betray a friend, Jesus says, is to curse the day you were born (Job 3:3), the worst suffering possible, which Judas will learn when he commits suicide.

In John’s Gospel, it is when Judas receives the morsel of bread from Jesus that “Satan entered him,” and he rushes into the night (John 13:26). He is the first to know the darkness that will swallow up the whole world when Jesus goes to the cross. Judas fulfills another saying from Jesus when he asked his disciples: “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world but lose his very self?” (Matt 16:26). He sells Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

Judas confronts us with the same question he asked the chief priest as we deepen our walk into the Triduum: “What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” How much is our discipleship worth? Looking back at our lives, what have we valued most, strived and worked to gain with our time, treasure and talent? What would we sell our very souls to possess or protect?

This is why it takes a faith community to help us enter these days. We need the support and example of others to know that losing our lives is how we will find them. We witness this each day during the pandemic from hospital workers, police, firefighters and first responders willing to risk their lives to save others. We remember it in our grandparents, parents and teachers, who emptied their hopes into our dreams. We are invited by Jesus to find our lives by losing them for others, as he did during these holy days that won for us our salvation.