

“How pale thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn.”

That’s the first line of stanza two from the hymn, “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded.” I’m pretty sure you’re aware that the abuse and scorn for Jesus began long before the physical abuse. It began with the actions of a friend; of one whom he loved; a companion with whom he had travelled many miles and shared many meals. The actions of a friend led to sorrow and grief that compounded the weight of sin that he carried on the cross.

At the table that Thursday night, Jesus has said, “One of you will betray me.” His disciples became sad and asked, “Is it I, Lord? ” You need to ask that question too, as do I. Have I sold you out, Lord? Have I lived for the pleasures of this world—have I bought into them rather than wanting You—spending time with You—hearing Your words of Life? Have I lived as if I mattered most? Have I given my allegiance to someone other than you? Is it I, Lord?

Here’s the distinct pain of betrayal. The wound of betrayal is not inflicted on Jesus by those who are distant from him; by those who are not his companions, his friends, his close ones. No. This is a pain that comes from those who are nearest to Him. “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me,” Jesus said. Not someone unknown, but someone near. Dear. Loved.

And that love demands your attention. Don’t think for a second that Jesus’ love for Judas, his betrayer, was altered by the betrayal. In Psalm 145 verse 9 it says, “The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.” He loved this man who would turn away from Him. For Judas, the betrayal was so big a sin that he was convinced that it was unforgivable. That he was unforgivable. And make no mistake, the betrayal was horrible. What on earth can justify handing over a person who has shown you only benevolence and love into the agony of torture, crucifixion, and death? What madness would lead the creature to betray the kind Creator? To chase worldly wealth that spoils and fades, spurning the treasure that never ends?

“The Son of Man goes as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have better for that man if he had not been born.” Did Jesus ever say something more terrifying? But do you see that Jesus did not say this out of hatred or anger or any such thing. He spoke from the depth of his compassion. He knew that in the end, Judas would go to his grave believing that his sin was stronger than God’s mercy. And if you can imagine it, it broke Jesus’ heart.

If there’s one thing life teaches us, it’s that you can spend a lot of time with another person, and not really know them at all. That’s the case here. Judas didn’t really understand Jesus. How do we know that? Because it was for the sin of Judas—for the sin of anyone who has ever been a Judas—that the Son of Man let them pound in the nails. It was for the sin of Judas—for the sin of anyone who has ever been a Judas—that Jesus pleaded, “Father, forgive them!” It was for the sin of Judas—of every Judas—that Jesus let “grim death and

cruel rigor" (in the words of our hymn) rob him of his life, so that the weight of such a death would never have to fall on them. On us.

The pain of betrayal is great. It wounded Jesus' tender heart. But the thing that makes Jesus 'Jesus' is that it never turned his heart to bitterness. In his heart lives a love too strong for bitterness, too mighty for hatred to conquer it. Jesus went on loving, even though it killed him.

The heart of Jesus is the heart of Christian spirituality. Here's what I mean: in the wounded One, in the crucified Christ, we discover a love that sets us free to love as we have been loved. Our Lord often spoke of taking up our cross and following him. Do you see now what your cross is? When you are betrayed, when you are rejected, when you are reduced to tears, when you are angered and you are tempted to get even, what do you do? You know what human nature says to do. But you also know what Jesus did at the cross. You also know you have been baptized into his love. That means you can say, by the power of Jesus who forgave me, even when I betrayed him so many times, I forgive. By the power of Jesus who loved me, even when I sold him out, I will love you, the one who has hurt me. This is a cross, my friends. It will be torture to your human nature, but to the new self that God creates in baptism and faith, it will be joy. You will be sharing in the very life of your Savior.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, tonight we celebrate the love that is in your Son Jesus—a love stronger than all our betrayals. Convince us, as we dwell on the sacrifice of your Son, that your mercy is mightier than our sin, and lead us to gladly bear the cross of Christ-like forgiveness. Strengthen us for this through your gospel and sacraments. By your Spirit, make us more like you. Amen.