

Sermon for the First Vespers of Lent

"The hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Mark 14:41).

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Throughout this season of Lent, our eyes will serve as a metaphor for the sin that dwells within us - treacherous eyes, slanderous eyes, proud eyes and arrogant eyes, brutal eyes, heartless eyes, unappeasable eyes... The list is long according to St.

Paul's words to Timothy (2 Tim 3:1-5), but tonight we will consider our "Betraying Eyes," that we may turn from our betrayal to gaze upon the light of Christ who forgives our sin and gathers us to new life.

When we think of betrayal, certainly we think of Judas who handed Jesus over to sinful men who would have Him killed. The name has come to signify the height of treachery, for Judas was one of the twelve, one of the chosen, one of the privileged who had a place in the inner circle with Jesus. He knew firsthand the love and mercy of Christ. He had witnessed His miracles and healings. He had heard Jesus speak of love and grace and mercy... So how could he have committed such a treacherous act? How could he have betrayed his Lord in such a callous way?

Certainly, you and I would never do a thing like that, right? "Is it I?" they all asked, one after the other as they sat down to the feast with their Lord. "Surely it is not me," we all reassure ourselves... And we would be wrong.

For the fact is, we all filter the world through the lenses of our own wants, our own needs, and our own expectations... Like Judas and all

of us who have taken our flesh from Adam, we are all “lovers of self,” as St. Paul writes, “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim 3:2-4), always looking for ways to make things go the way we think they should go. And that’s all Judas was trying to do. He thought he had a better plan, a way of jump-starting the kingdom by forcing Jesus’ hand and getting the revolution started. He saw it as a way of getting himself where he wanted to be: a better life, a better kingdom, more money and more status - in fact, a 30-piece bonus of silver to boot - It’s win/win, right?!

So Judas went to the chief priests and offered to hand Jesus over. “And when they heard it, they were glad” (Mark 14:10), for the Jews had been looking for a way to arrest Jesus. And now, here was Judas, offering them the perfect opportunity in an isolated garden in the middle of the night.

When the hour had come, Judas’s plan was in place. The Passover meal had begun, and it was there that Jesus calmly surveyed the scene, and then spoke the unspeakable: “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me, one who is eating with Me” (Mark 14:18). In other words, Jesus knows our sin. He sees our treacherous hearts and our betraying eyes - which is why He lovingly invites us with these words to examine ourselves, to be honest with ourselves, to confess that we are sinful and unclean that He might save us from ourselves. As Jesus called Judas and all of them to repentance, “they began to be sorrowful and to say one after another, ‘Is it I?’” Am I really capable of sinning against my Lord Jesus Christ?

And the answer, of course, is YES - “It is I.” It is you. It is me... We have all participated in the sins of Judas - We have all committed treason by turning against our Lord. For that is, after all, what sin is: It is the betrayal of our King of grace and the new life He has given us in Baptism.

And now, because of our sin, “the Son of Man [must go] as it is written of Him” (Mark 14:21), “betrayed into the hands of sinners” (v. 41) - betrayed not only *by* you, but **FOR** you! Because it is for this very reason that Jesus came, to be betrayed and to pour out His holy, precious blood for your sin, for Judas’s sin, for the sin of the whole world. “The Son of Man

came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

And this is where things get interesting, for the verb usually translated as “betray” that weaves its way through our text tonight can also be translated, “to hand over” or “to deliver.” And while it was certainly by *means* of Judas that Jesus was “handed over,” it was in fact God the Father who “gave” His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). In fact, He continues to hand Him over for you. For Jesus is “given, handed over, delivered” for you every Sunday at this altar. St. Paul writes, “what I *received* from the Lord I also *delivered/handed over* to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when *He was betrayed/delivered/handed over* took bread . . .” And while we are accustomed to hearing “on the night when He was betrayed,” the fact remains, God the Father handed Jesus over for you - the Apostles then handed down the Lord’s Supper for you - and in that Meal, Jesus now hands His body and blood over for you, that your sins may be forgiven in Him.

Tonight, as you look through your betraying eyes, do not try to hide your crimes, but confess them. For Jesus knows you are sinners - He knew that when He went to the cross for you, and He knows it now as He comes for you with His forgiveness. As you think of those times that you have betrayed Him; as you recall those times that you have made promises to Him you couldn’t keep; as you think about all the commandments that you have broken, remember that Jesus was handed over for you - that His forgiveness was delivered for you - that His Holy Absolution, His grace in Holy Baptism, His life-giving body and blood are being given over and over and over again for you. Let us therefore “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross” (Heb 12:2). And as you hear those precious words, “on the night when He was betrayed,” rejoice that He was *handed over* for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

*Sermon Text: Mark
14:1-21, 41-46*