

PASTOR'S COLUMN

Feast of the Resurrection (Easter Sunday) April 11, 2004

THE BETRAYAL

(This column was written one year ago, on Easter Sunday, April 20, 2003, when the United States was beginning the war on Iraq. We are now one year into this course of action. A civil and sincere debate regarding our efforts must continue, especially within Catholic circles. I share my views with you simply in the hope that these thoughts will continue on the road to deeper dialogue and understanding.)

During this Lenten Season and in these days of the War on Iraq, I have been, in a special way, reflecting upon and praying with the "Betrayal of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane."

These are the scenes from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in which, on the night before He dies, Jesus is betrayed:

"While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived accompanied by a large crowd, with swords and clubs, who had come from the chief priests and the elders of the people. His betrayer had arranged a sign with them, saying, 'The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him.'

Immediately he went over to Jesus and said, 'Hail, Rabbi' and he kissed him. Jesus answered him, 'Friend, do what you have come for.' Then stepping forward they laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. And behold, one of those who accompanied Jesus put his hand to his sword, drew it, and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and he will not provide me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels? But then how could the scriptures be fulfilled which say that it must come to pass in this way?'

At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to seize me? Day after day I sat teaching in the Temple area, yet you did not arrest me. But all this has come to pass that the writings of the prophets may be fulfilled.' Then all the disciples left him and fled.

Those who had arrested Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled."

Matthew 26:47



"Then while he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs who had come from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. His betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, 'The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him and lead him away securely.' He came and immediately went over to him and said, 'Rabbi.' And he kissed him. At this they laid hands on him and arrested him. One of the bystanders drew his sword, struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his ear. Jesus said to them in reply, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs, to seize me? Day after day I was with you teaching in the temple area, yet you did not arrest me; but that the scriptures may be fulfilled.' And they all left him and fled. Now a young man followed him wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body. They seized him, but he left the cloth behind and ran off naked.

They led Jesus away to the high priest, and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together.

Mark 14: 43-53



"While he was speaking, a crowd approached and in front was one of the Twelve, a man named Judas. He went up to Jesus to kiss him. Jesus said to him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? His disciples realized what was about to happen, and they asked, 'Lord, shall we strike with a sword?' And one of them struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said in reply, 'Stop, no more of this!' Then he touched the servant's ear and healed him. And Jesus said the chief priests and temple guards and elders who had come for him, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? Day after day I was in the temple area, and you did not seize me; but this is your hour, the time for the power of darkness.

After arresting him they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest..."

Luke 22:47-54

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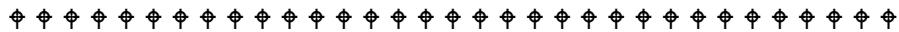
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“When he had said this, Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to where there was a garden, into which he and his disciples entered. Judas his betrayer also knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas got a band of soldiers and guards from the chief priests and the Pharisees and went there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus, knowing everything that was going to happen to him, went out and said to them, ‘Whom are you looking for?’ They answered him, ‘Jesus the Nazorean.’ He said to them, ‘I AM.’ Judas, his betrayer, was also with them. When he said to them, ‘I AM,’ they turned away and fell to the ground. So he again asked them, ‘Whom are you looking for?’ They said, ‘Jesus the Nazorean.’ Jesus answered, ‘I told you that I AM. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.’ This was to fulfill what he had said, ‘I have not lost any of those you gave me.’

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, ‘Put your sword into its scabbard. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?’

So the band of soldiers, the tribune, and the Jewish guards seized Jesus, bound him, and brought him to Annas first.”

John 18:1-13



The message that is overwhelming for me in these Scriptures is that Jesus in the face of evil, injustice, and violence chose to act powerfully and nonviolently. He remained steadfast to the truth, to His mission, and consciously chose to respond nonviolently. Rather than act in the same fashion as his betrayers, he chose to act differently. He “embraced” and “absorbed” the evil, the injustice, and the violence and transformed all of it into something new. New life, new hope, and new beginnings erupted on that Sunday Morning that we now call the Day of Resurrection.

In my mind, there is no getting around the fact that this Jesus of history, who is the Christ, who is our Lord and Savior, who is the Son of God, who is the Center of this Faith we call Christianity, was a man of nonviolence.

If I dare call myself his disciple, then I too must live in His Spirit, with his values, and respond to evil, injustice, and violence as He did.

This is not easy for any of us. Indeed it is a struggle in our personal lives and in the wider circles of life in which we act and participate – family, neighborhood, place of employment, civic community, nation, and the global community.

The “Betrayal Scenes” in Scripture, for me, clearly indicate that we betray Jesus whenever we choose a different response than His when we are faced with evil, injustice, and violence. Responding in like manner when we are inflicted only creates more evil, more injustice, and more violence. Only when we respond in a different fashion, in the Spirit of the Prince of Peace, do we destroy evil, injustice, and violence and create something new.

Living in this Spirit as one who is a Catholic and a citizen of the United States is a challenge for all of us. There are no easy answers. The issues are global and complex. But because they are, it does not relinquish our responsibility to seek living the Spirit of Jesus in all things, and at all times.

Personally, I believe that from my perspective as a Christian struggling to be faithful to the Spirit of Jesus, as a nation, we missed a golden opportunity to witness to something new as we continue to respond to terrorism which is evil, unjust, and violent.

Rather than responding in like manner, that is, violently, as we did and still do, we could have continued to utilize our enormous resources of intellect, power, good will, and money to unceasingly engage ourselves with the global community to seek an end to terrorism together.

Instead, again from my perspective, we have chosen violence, albeit as restrained as it may seem to many, as a response to violence. This in the long term will only create more violence. “And one of them struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said in reply, ‘Stop, no more of this!’ Then he touched the servant’s ear and healed him.” (Luke22: 50-51)

Might does not make right even when might is right. We must seek new ways for us to be in this ever shrinking global community of Earth.

These are my personal thoughts that come from my reflection on the Scriptures and from my relationship with the Lord Jesus. I share them with you as a small way to help all of us live more faithfully in the Spirit of Jesus.

Know that I honor and respect all who come to different conclusions in responding to these global concerns. I honor and respect all the military men and women who put their lives in harm’s way for their beliefs.

We need to continue to pray, dialogue, and respectfully honor our differences as we seek the Truth of Jesus together.

May our Celebration of the Paschal Mystery, the Suffering, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, bring just a bit more peace to our own personal worlds and to the global community.

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