

The Disciples' Diary

Bill MacCurtain SJ

As we hear the accounts of Jesus's Passion in the Holy Week liturgies, we may find ourselves contemplating the other characters involved in the events described to us. Bill MacCurtain SJ imagines the personal journeys of two such figures: Simon Peter, who was desperate to stay with Jesus; and Judas, who betrayed him. How did Peter learn of God's saving love through his confusing and frustrating relationship with Jesus? And might Judas have felt that he was the one betrayed?

Patronising God

Patronising God is so easily done, especially if you're a good person. Saint Peter tended to do this a lot and Jesus had quite a job getting him out of the habit. Simon Peter was a very good person. He was big-hearted, courageous and a born leader. He loved Jesus very much and when Jesus said he planned to go up to Jerusalem and allow the priests and the Pharisees to torture and kill him, Simon Peter was dead against it. He took him aside and told Jesus in no uncertain terms that he mustn't do it. Nor did he want Jesus to wash his feet. He had to be severely reprimanded on both occasions. In the garden of Gethsemane he wanted to die to defend Jesus and was again told off.

Poor old Simon Peter was very upset and confused. Jesus, whom he loved dearly, seemed to rebuff him at every turn. He had thought he knew him, but evidently he did not. When they arrested Jesus and took him away, Simon Peter followed along behind, not knowing what to do. He felt that Jesus did not want him around anymore.



'The Arrest of Christ' by Giotto di Bondone

Perhaps not very surprising, then, when he was challenged, that he claimed he did not know the man. He had placed himself in the firing line and been told he wasn't wanted. Then Jesus turned and looked at him and Simon Peter remembered what Jesus had foretold: before the cock crowed he would have denied three times that he knew Jesus.

Simon Peter went away and wept his heart out. The true message of the Passion began to hit home: Simon Peter had wanted to save Jesus, but it was Jesus who would save Simon Peter. The infinite love of God for us made it possible to bridge the chasm of our sinfulness so that we might be reclaimed as his sons and daughters.

The initiative remains with our Divine Redeemer. He is the lover who makes us the beloved. As St Paul says: 'It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith; not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God; not by anything that you have done so that nobody can claim the credit. We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it.' (Eph 2: 8-10)

Judas the Banker

Where did it all go wrong? We could have had the world at our feet. The potential was enormous. If only he had listened to me instead of to that crazy guru of the desert, that skewed genius with his death wish. As for that ignoramus Simon, imagine making him the leader! Mind you, the rest of them were no better, a bunch of losers, with the possible exception of the Zebedee brothers: they could see which side their bread was buttered on if only they weren't so impressionable.

But Jesus was the real disappointment. Here was a charismatic leader who could seduce you with a smile and make a man feel good about himself. And that was what got to me because, to be honest, I wasn't great at making friends. I do not suffer fools gladly, as you might say, but I know how the world works and I saw in the extraordinary powers of that man just what the country needed to shake off the tyranny of Rome, sideline the Sanhedrin, fulfil all the promises of the prophets and make us a great nation.

For all his knowledge about turning water into wine and feeding thousands out of practically nothing, Jesus's understanding of human nature was sadly lacking: filling bellies was a good move, but asking us to love one another is like trying to make silk purses

out of sows' ears – just shows how out of touch with reality he was. If you ask me, spitting in the wind will not conquer the world – get real! My dreams of power were heading for disaster: I felt utterly betrayed.

So I decided to rescue what I could from the shambles of what had seemed a promising career, and sound out the opposition. The Pharisees were a small-minded collection of dullards, but at least they had enough nous to gauge the temper of the times and protect their own interests. There was no knowing what an enterprising chap might be able to do to further their cause, shake them out of their parochial mindset, help them to think outside the box. They wanted Jesus; I hoped I could trade him for a position of influence, but they were too wily for me. Thirty pieces of silver! What a liberty! You should have seen their smug faces when I flung the miserly silver back at them and how they scrambled to pick up their blood money with scant regard for their dignity as men of the cloth.

If only he were still alive I could go back to him, and I know he would have me back like a shot. But now he's gone and I am a dead man.

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