

People are always troubled by the figure of Judas in the Apostolic College. His presence there is indeed a mystery; we are assured that Jesus had a quite unique awareness of what a man had in him, and never needed to ask questions about people; and that is what we would expect of one who had no barriers in him against the working of grace . The ability to relate is the greatest sign of grace, and if there are no barriers between a man and God the Father, he should experience little difficulty in relating to other human beings.

To exclude Judas (or someone like Judas) from the Twelve would have been quite at odds with the Incarnation itself. Jesus does not wait for a perfect world before he entrusts himself to it. And given the eventual shape of our salvation, it is essential that sin should come very close to him. In each of our relationships with Jesus it is the same. Our goodness is dear to him, but he loves us even as sinners.

So the story of the Passion isn't like a Western, with half the people wearing white hats and the other half wearing black ones. Indeed, the ones on our side do very badly, proving weak, unreliable, and treacherous. At least Caiaphas and Pilate don't waver, but perform their expected parts consistently. In this, at least, they look more like Jesus than the disciples do. We should tell ourselves over and over: the scene we contemplate in the Cross, the heart of our understanding of God's love, wasn't created by the Church or by the friends of Jesus. It was created by a coalition between God the Father and the *sinful* world, what John calls "the world that would not accept him". This shocking reality is what Judas represents, with his hand on the Lord's table and in the common purse, and a heart that cannot separate itself from the world of bribes and lucrative betrayals.

The words of Jesus today are therefore significant for us:

*I tell you this now before it happens,
so that when it does happen
you may believe that I am He.*

You might conclude that Jesus' betrayal, his being handed over, his being condemned and his being executed are all signs of his unfitness to be followed, his unworthiness to be trusted, his complete misreading of people and situations. If he were asking for votes in an election, we could ask him why he got things so wrong, why he surrounded himself with knaves, and why he was a failure on the grand scale. But when we read the Gospel, and understand the mission the Father had entrusted to him, all of these things come to be read in a new context, and Jesus appears as one directing himself into the heart of darkness, tipping away all that he has recklessly, into the hands of untrustworthy humanity. In this we see the truth about the love of God for us, which counts no cost in its generosity, which would be the same if not one good man were left.

Whoever welcomes me welcomes the One who sent me.