

## Growing in Grace #7—Holy Week

We have arrived at the Holiest week in the Christian Year. On Palm Sunday, we remember that the people of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus, hoping that he would order the removal of the Roman soldiers to free the city from occupation. But Jesus instead, entered the Temple, and threw out the money changers and the animal keepers. This action stopped the Sacrifices in the temple, in fact, stopped any Worship being done in the Temple. Imagine how the priests and temple officials thought about that! Jesus and the Disciples occupied the Temple all day long, until they left in the evening to journey back to Bethany.

The next interesting day in Holy Week is today. It is called Spy Wednesday by many, though it is not called that in the Church Calendar. Today is the day when Judas secretly decided to betray Jesus. The Gospel of St Luke says: *“Then Satan entered into Judas ...who went to the chief priests and the officers of the guard to discuss a scheme for handing Jesus over to them. They were delighted and agreed to give him money.”*

We don't know why Judas decided to betray Jesus. I doubt if it was for the money since 30 coins wasn't that much. Could Judas have lost his faith in Jesus, and decided to get what little he could before he left the Disciples? Or was Judas hoping that Jesus would respond to the betrayal with some miracle that would prove His divinity? Whatever the reason, today is the day that Judas entered into a bargain with the Temple authorities to betray Jesus. That is why today can be called Spy Wednesday, to remind us of the terrible bargain made to betray Jesus. Down through the centuries, others have turned on Jesus and His Church, sometimes to make money for themselves, or other times to feather their own caps. In our own life are there times when we have made decisions that were against the love of God, or against some of the people in the Church? Whatever, Judas came to realize the enormity of what he had done and committed suicide—instead of coming back to Jesus in penitence and shame, to confess his sin. Judas committed the ultimate sin—but have you ever been tempted to turn your back on the Lord? And if you did, are you ready to return in penitence to confess your sin?

Spy Wednesday is today, but tomorrow, Thursday, is a wonderful day in the Life of the Lord. We call it Maundy Thursday, because the word Maundy comes from the Latin word: Mandatum, which means Commandment. What Commandment do we mean? It is the Commandment of Jesus when He said: *“Do this in remembrance of Me.”* He said this at the Last Supper, when all His disciples were gathered around—*“and Jesus took bread and wine and said: “This is My Body—This is My Blood—Do this in Remembrance of Me.”* And Christians have done just that down through the centuries, whenever we get together. But be careful, our English does not help us understand this:

When Jesus said the word which in English we call Remembrance, he didn't just mean to remember Him. No. The word in Greek is “anamnesis” which is better translated *“to make me Present.”* So, Jesus was actually saying: *“Do this to Make Me Present.”* Thus, following what Jesus has given us, whenever a priest takes the bread and wine, and says these holy words of Jesus, Jesus Himself becomes Present in the Bread and Wine. He

attaches His Presence to the Bread and Wine so that we can join with Him in His Offering in Heaven, and then receive Himself into our souls and bodies. It is the greatest act of worship that we are able to do—and in that way we have followed the Holy Commandment of Jesus week by week down through the centuries. Maundy Thursday is foundational in the Christian Church. In the Last Supper, Jesus was giving His disciples and us the perfect way to make Him present to us, in every century, in every place, for every event. Are you conscious that Jesus is actually present in the Blessed Sacrament? His Grace is right there for you, and He is waiting for you to take His Precious Body and Blood into your very soul. Here is a perfect way in which you can Grow in Grace. Jesus is loving you, and wanting you to love Him back, so that you can grow closer to Him, your Lord. He is waiting for you to adore Him—and He is with you every time you receive His Body and Blood.

Following the Last Supper, Jesus and His disciples went out to the Garden of Gethsemane, to share and to pray. Jesus knew what was coming, though the disciples did not. Judas had left in the middle of the Last Supper to alert the Temple police that the time was now to arrest Jesus. So as Jesus prayed in the Garden, the police were arriving, led by Judas, the betrayer of Jesus. At first the disciples tried to defend Jesus, but it was no use. Jesus gave Himself over to the police, and the disciples fled in terror.

That night, Jesus was brought up for trial before the chief priests. It was a forgone conclusion. Guilty. Peter had quietly watched the trial, but he was almost caught himself. It was time for him to go.

On the Good Friday morning, Jesus was hauled before Pilate, who for reasons of his own, pronounced Jesus guilty and ordered the Crucifixion. Jesus the son of God, who had for 3 years been teaching and healing and loving, was condemned to die. He had annoyed the priests by contradicting their teaching. He had annoyed the Romans by acknowledging that He was King, which meant that Caesar was not. He had to die, said the powers in Jerusalem.

But Jesus had another idea. He had been called the Lamb of God, that is, the Sacrificial Lamb offered in the Temple for the forgiveness of sin. He knew that with His death on the Cross, he became the Sacrificial Lamb that could take away the sins of the world. He and only He could bring you and I back into a loving relationship with the Father. His Death was the one act that would bring us forgiveness. The world needs that forgiveness and so do you and I. Jesus, as the world's perfect representative, offered Himself on the Cross to the Father, so that we could have a new and growing relationship with the Father. The Cross unites God and us in a new life, a new relationship, a new growing love.

That is why Jesus accepted the pain of the Cross, accepted the Death that awaited Him, because of His great Love for all of us. We call it Good Friday because of what Jesus did for us on the Cross.

Jesus died on that Cross, after praying for the soldiers who crucified Him, committing His Holy Mother into the care of St John, after welcoming the Penitent thief into Paradise, and

after committing His Life into the Hands of the Father. He was taken down from the Cross, clothed in a linen cloth and buried in a borrowed tomb. And everyone there thought it was all over.

But God had other ideas. Early on the Sunday morning, an angel rolled away the stone, and Jesus arose, resurrected in the New Life. The gals who had come to anoint His dead body were stunned to find Him alive, more alive than anyone had ever been. The male disciples poo-pooed the words of St Mary Magdalene who told them that Jesus was alive, but then they were stunned when later Jesus Himself appeared to them alive in the Upper Room. The Resurrection of Christ begins a new day of a living relationship with God for us all. From now on, every one of us can have a growing relationship with the Father, through the Son, and in the Power of the Holy Spirit. God is the Creator who wants a growing life for us, a growing love lived with each of us. As St Peter said:

*“ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who in His great mercy gave us a new birth as His children”*