

Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Second Bridegroom Service - Great and Holy Tuesday 2023



My beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are now in the midst of our most precious season, and the hymns of the Church alert us to what is happening in this last week of the Lord's earthly ministry. Day by day, we will follow the Lord on His Way to the Cross.

Tonight, we hear the words of Judas, as he conspires with the Sanhedrin to betray the Lord. It is very hard for us to hear these words against His Lord and Teacher:

"What will you give me, and I will betray Him into your hands?" *

"What will you give me?" Are these the words of a friend? Of a disciple? Of someone who has spent the last three years following you through thick and thin?

Indeed, they are not. And the traitorous compact that Judas made with the Sanhedrin should make us all think about our lives. What is it that we want? What is our price for the thirty pieces of silver?

You see, my beloved Christians, we must not think of Judas as an only exception to the rule. We do not know what motivated Judas – there have been countless theories through the centuries. The Gospel of John tells us that he was a thief.[†] But if money was his only reason, then why did he return the thirty pieces of silver?[‡] As with all human failings, there is more here than meets the eye. But one thing is certain. He betrayed his Lord and Master for his own interests, without regard to the consequences – both for his Lord, and for himself.

Yet, even in the very act of betrayal, when Judas kisses the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane, to give the signal for the arrest, Jesus treats him with mercy. Does he condemn him for his treachery? No!

In fact, in the face of the obvious storm descending on Gethsemane – soldiers, torches, clubs, swords, all led by Judas – the Lord chooses to give him another

chance. He asks him: “My Friend, why are you here?” §

The Lord meets the kiss of betrayal with a loving, merciful question. It is obvious why Judas is there, surrounded by a mob of armed men! But the Lord, Who knows all, and Who sees all, grants even at this late hour, a chance for reprieve.

Just like that moment in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve had disobeyed and eaten the fruit, and were hiding themselves, that we hear the Divine Voice cry out: “Where are you?”**

Was the all-knowing God unaware of their location? Of course not! But you see, the question opens the door to repentance, to change, to transformation.

My beloved Christians: Even after the worst betrayal, God’s love never fails. That is why the worst sinners can become the greatest saints. But the choice is ours. If we choose to remain blind to our own motivations and intentions, then the consequences can be disastrous for ourselves, and also for those around us.

This may be why the Lord was so hard on the Scribes and the Pharisees, as we heard in this evening’s Gospel reading. They pretended to be holy, to be righteous. They covered themselves with a religious veneer, beneath which they were filled with hypocrisy and deceit. The Lord preached hard truths to them, to wake them from their self-delusion.

But to Judas, who was so far gone in the dark morass of his sins, the Lord asked a merciful question to bring him back. To each, like the most excellent physician of souls, our Lord Jesus administered the treatment that would save them, that would heal them.

My friends, may we open ourselves – may we question ourselves with piercing honesty, so that we may receive God’s healing grace in our lives this Holy Week, and thus arrive in health of heart, soul, and mind at His Glorious Resurrection. Amen.

* Kathisma of Matins of Holy and Great Tuesday; cf. Matthew 26:14.

† John 12:6.

‡ Matthew 27:3.

§ Matthew 26:50.

**** Genesis 3:9.**

Photos: Stelios Lambrou

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