

Blessed Betrayers

'In the Church, Jesus entrusts Himself to those who betray Him over and over.' Pope Emeritus Benedict

As we proceed with Jesus to Calvary, we linger at the Last Supper where we witness St. Peter dining comfortably with Jesus, curious of who Jesus' betrayer might be and confident that it is not himself (JN 13:21-38).

Perhaps the purpose of Lent and Holy Week is to challenge such confidence by inviting us into the desert in order to spotlight our denials. No better lesson than St. Peter's: after a holy meal surrounded by friends, he steps out alone into the klieg light where he strives to save his life rather than lose it for Jesus (JN 18: 15-27). I am less surprised by his and our unwillingness to be true to Jesus than by our lack of self-awareness. Only faithful? We deceive ourselves.

The seven virtues we looked at this Lent expose gaps; they highlight self-illusions. We whose hope masks unresolved grief, whose faith caves to fear in a second, and whose love dares not conflict—the desert lays us bare. In the heat and the hunger, we who champion global justice and enslave love ones, who exercise fortitude in consuming multiple episodes of 'Game of Thrones' or 'Walking Dead' but cannot abide with Jesus for 10 minutes, and while viewing divide our souls with more graphic violence, sex and words than our grandparents experienced in their lifetimes—that is the unchaste mess we are in.

At least Peter's three denials were obvious. Ours are not. This Lent, I am grateful for a renewed awareness of my denial of wisdom, the truth of how things really are. I would rather frame reality as pleasant in order to please myself and sleep peacefully. I am subject to the spirit of the Israelites who implored the wise: 'Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel' (IS 30: 10, 11)!

Like St. Peter, we want to honor Jesus but refuse to be personally dishonored. Peter refused a good foot-washing (JN 13:6-8). Yet he like us needed cleansing at core. We need love to engulf our clubfeet, scour the dirt and stench, and transform our moral disabilities into something pleasing to God. He sees all and summons us to give Him all this Maundy Thursday. Hobble to the altar with expectancy. Take heart: 'The burning sand will become a pool' (IS 35: 7).