The Lord is arrested, led over the brook of Kedron; a story we will tell about in the last Holy Hour. And Judas had found his Lord because the Gospel tells us that our Lord was often accustomed to go there to pray. Only those who have been cradled in the sacred association of the Church know how to betray. Judas knew where to find the Lord after dark, and in all the great apocalyptic literature, Robert Hugh Benson, Soloviev, and Dostoevsky. The betrayal of Christ in His Church is always From within, not from without. In Benson, it was a Cardinal, in Dostoevsky it was a Cardinal, and in Soloviev it was a Cardinal. The title means nothing but the fact is, he was a priest. These writers made the priest one who had been at the time.

Who will ever forget Dostoevsky’s description of Christ coming to the city of Seville in about the 16th Century? The Grand Inquisitor is a wisened old Cardinal over ninety years of age. And when our Blessed Lord returns he sees a child being brought into a Church. He raises the child to life and the Grand Inquisitor reminds Him that He came to bring freedom but people did not want to be free. They really want to be slaves of something. And he said, “Tomorrow we will burn You. Leave and never come back.” And our Lord bent over and kissed the whitened cheeks of the old cardinal and for the first time in many years blood came to his cheeks. And once again he said, “Never again come back.”

Is it any wonder then that St. Peter along with Ezekiel in the Old Testament speak of the destruction of the Temple and the persecution of the Church is coming from within. Ezekiel said, “Incipite a sanctuario meo,” and St. Peter; “Begin at my sanctuary.” Begin there in the sanctuary, and that was what was first destroyed when Titus and Vespasian took over Jerusalem. And Peter said that’s the way it will be at the end.

Judas now has his money but not very much, $17.40. Divinity is always betrayed out of all proportion to its due worth, always a ridiculous figure. So when a man gives up his priesthood what does he get? He gets $500.00 in royalties for a book attacking the Church, an hour on television to make light of it and celibacy. Three thousand nights in bed and he is sick of it all. Judas was sick of it all, took back his thirty pieces of silver and sent them rolling across the temple floor and he said, “Look, you do it.” All that it was fit for was to buy a field of blood. And he might have, if he had just a spark of faith, have received pardon and forgiveness from the Lord, Who would forgive such betrayals seventy times seven.

It is interesting to make a comparison of Peter and Judas. Our Lord warned both that they would fail. They both failed, they both denied or betrayed the Lord and they both repented. But the difference in the word repent is that Judas repented unto himself and Peter repented unto the Lord. They were the same up to that point. St. Paul therefore says there are two kinds of sorrow, the sorrow of the world and the sorrow of true faith. So Judas no longer is full of despair and he walks over the rocky ground and each rock seem just as hard and cruel as his own heart. The limb of every tree seemed like a pointing finger, “Traitor, traitor, traitor!” The knot on every tree seemed like an accusing eye. And he hanged himself and as the Acts of the Apostles tells us, his bowels burst asunder. “And he went to his own place.” That is all… his own place. Everything has its own place. You open the cage of a bird and the bird goes to its own place. You drop a stone from the hand and the stone goes to its own place. We do not know what this propiam locum was of Judas but we do know the reason of the fall and may that reason sharpen the resolution of our will so that we will not fail the Eucharist. If we could read the hearts of those who have left, faith broke, it snapped somewhere making light of the Eucharist, anything at all but no longer the sense of the invisible and the beautiful presence of Christ.

And the great tragedy of the life of Judas, one of the twelve, is that he might have been Saint Judas.

Judas

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

In the past few years in the Church we have had many psychological and sociological studies, all attempting to explain why some priests have left their sacred calling. I presume they have some value but it is interesting that none of them thought of making a biblical study of why a priest leaves. Perhaps we could find much if we study the Gospels and studied Judas.

His name was Iscariot; no one knows exactly what that meant. Maybe it was Sicarius, in the Greek, a dagger bearer. In this case he would have been classified as a revolutionist bent on driving the Romans out of the land of Israel. But in any case; one day a babe was born in Kerioth, a child of promise. Friends brought gifts to the parents and time went on and that babe of Kerioth grew in age and he met a babe who was born in Bethlehem who had grown in age and grace and wisdom, and at the parting of the waters, Christ chose Judas to be an Apostle. He did not choose him to be a traitor, but to be an Apostle.

Almost all studies that have been made seriously of Judas say that the principal reason that he left is because he was avaricious. There is indeed some Gospel evidence for this. For, just a week before the Passion of our Blessed Lord, the Savior was invited into the house of Simon, the Pharisee, and what the host saw brought a blush to his cheek. He looked up and saw a woman who was an intruder. Outside, friends could come and stand along the wall and listen to a conversation at table. This woman however, annoyed him to some extent. He would not have minded it if anyone else had been there; but the Rabbi, what would he think of it.

She was a woman, a sinner. Her hair was long and she did not attempt to brush it back. As she came toward the table, and in those days everyone reclined at table on the left arm free to eat, she came and stood over the feet of our Blessed Lord and let fall upon the sandaled harbingers of peace, a few tears like the first warm drops of a summer rain. Then ashamed of what she had done, she attempted to wipe away the tears with her hair. All the while Simon was thinking to himself, “If He only knew what kind of a woman she is.”

How did he know?

She took from about her neck, a small vessel. In those days women carried precious perfume about the neck in a bottle and when they attended funeral rites, they would break the bottle over the remains and then after allowing the perfume to fall upon the corpse, they would throw even the remains of the bottle onto the body. And she releases from her neck, this vessel of precious ointment and it does not do what you and I do, pour it out gently drop by drop, but pour it on, a slow task, as if to indicate by the slowness of our giving, the generosity of our gift. She broke the vessel... gave everything. For love knows no limits.

Judas all the while got a whiff of this perfume. Oscar Wilde describes a syniac as one who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. And he immediately fixed a price, three hundred days wages. This perfume let me tell you, was no ordinary smell #5. So Judas now becomes the defender of the social order. He breaks up the routine of the dinner by saying,
Simon Iscariot. He it was who would betray Him and he was one of the twelve.

When do priests begin to break? When they lose their faith in the Eucharist! It is not seen, it is not commented upon, a dozen other explanations will be given and the faith is generally lost long before others. For even in the first chapter, when the Apostles at table knew what was happening because the Gospel tell us that they thought Judas had gone out either to buy food for the Passover or else to give money to the poor. In other words, do not expect that anyone who is satanic looks satanic. You would never think that anyone who is going out to conduct the Liturgy, to prepare the Liturgy, was satanic. You wouldn’t think that anyone who was going out to distribute alms was satanic, but Satan was in him. Then it is after he leaves that our Blessed Lord pronounces that word “now”. “Now Father, glorify Thy Son with the glory that I had with thee before the foundation of the world was laid.”

The Lord now prepares to go down to the garden; there is only one recorded time in the life of our Blessed Lord that He ever sang and that was the night He went out to His death! They go into the garden, He thought He could depend on three, Peter, James and John; John rather loving, Peter loyal in an intense kind of way, James ready always to follow leadership, but He told them to watch and pray. “Watch!” (Look out for the external environment—that is your horizontal problem.) “Pray!” (Look at the attentiveness to Heaven.) “Be prepared for the next day now, step by step.” The poor! I can imagine that he probably went on and argued that Judas lived all over again.

Well, I knew that the bishop did have concern for the poor, ecumenism as well. And I said to him. “Why don’t you find out how much he stole?”

Actually he stole over $25,000.00 from the chancery and then stole a wife who was a mother of four children. It was the story of Judas lived all over again.

So, the argument that Judas fell because he was avaricious does seem to have some substance. But…does avaricious really make a priest fall? As a matter of fact, in the history of the Church avaricious men have stayed in. Sometimes the Church can be a comfortable haven for the avarice. Furthermore, avarice is an old man’s sin; sin of youth is lust and middle age, power. Old age avarice, for it is a kind of economic immortality. See how well I have provided for myself. And, Judas was not an old man. Avarice therefore, cannot have been the cause of his leaving. What then was the cause?

Can you think of the first time that the fall of Judas is mentioned in the Gospels; the very first time? If you can recall that moment then you can have the answer to why there is a break in the priesthood. Where is the first mention of the fall of Judas? The day our Lord announced the Eucharist! When did Judas leave? The night our Lord gave the Eucharist! He broke at the announcement of the Eucharist; as a matter of fact, that was a critical moment in the life of our Blessed Lord. When He announced the Eucharist He lost the masses because He refused to be a bread King. Secondly, He lost some of his disciples; they left him and walked no more. Finally He split His Apostolic band. And here is the end of the story in the announcement of the Eucharist. Concluding words, “Who is it that will betray Me?” Have you forgotten the whole chapter of John? And when the disciples withdrew and no longer went about with Him, Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also want to leave me?”

Simon Peter answered, “Lord to whom shall we go? Your words are the words of Eternal Life. We have faith and we know that you are the Holy One of God.” And Jesus answered, “Have I not chosen you? All twelve? Yet, one of you is a devil!”

He meant Judas, the son of our Lord was well known in Jerusalem, everyone knew him.” If they would only leave, but they couldn’t long,) wiped them with a towel, “Your strength took them away.” If they thought Judas had twelve? Yet, one of you is a devil!” He meant Judas, the son of Zebedee. Probably Judas had a large inheritance, but Jesus was observing that he did not use it and the Pharisees and the Sadducees did. Judas did not use his inheritance. Secondly, He split His Apostolic Band. A sign. This is a sign. When the bread was dipped in the sauce, it was the mark of a servant, a slave, (tying humanity about Himself, tied it up.) Further more… that is your horizontal problem.}