

## *Homily for Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2018*

Betrayal. Not a pleasant subject. However this has become a very contemporary theme whether applied to people, beliefs, ideas, whistle blowing, sport and even our personal data.

Historically, and possibly almost as famously, betrayal features even earlier in history than Judas: remember the betrayal of Caesar by Brutus in 44BC. More recently you can hear the term between bandied about by politicians and in the press. I am sure you can come up with your own examples depending where you stand on issues. I understand that President Putin regards former pardoned spies as Judases and we know what can happen to them. Betrayal is also a strong theme in literature. Think of the jealousy by a teenage girl leading to the lies and long lasting effects of betrayal in *Atonement*. It is a very messy and emotional subject.

Have you ever been betrayed or done the betraying? How do we respond in the face of betrayal?

I cannot claim to have been betrayed or to knowingly have betrayed someone. However..... upon further thought I was reminded of when not so long ago I was a member of the Committee for the Durham County Voluntary Ranger Service. This is the voluntary group who organised the Durham guided walks' programme, semi- detached from the County Council. Owing to austerity measures and reorganisation of voluntary services at the Council the Committee had to decide whether to see the service absorbed within the new Volunteer Durham arrangements directly under Council control. This included abolishing ourselves as a Committee. The alternative was to re-establish the group as an autonomous voluntary organisation with their own fund raising, office, staff, insurance risk, etc. The existing set up had lasted over 46 years and there were many longstanding members who said they felt - yes betrayed -

by the Council for creating the crisis. Our Committee also bore the brunt of the dissent for reluctantly going along with it.

You could feel the emotion and resentment coming out at meetings with Council members and Officers. It is not a pleasant experience even if in all conscience I had not thought we had betrayed anyone, but come to the most sensible decision under difficult circumstances.

So what about Judas and Jesus? Why did Judas betray Jesus?

Scholars suggest Judas was disillusioned in that he had expected Jesus to bring about a political revolution. He was also at the outer circle of relations between Jesus and the disciples. It surely cannot have been just for 30 pieces of silver. What did he betray - not Jesus's teaching explicitly, but where Jesus could be found by the Jewish authorities, so he could be arrested: an act that was coldly thought through and pre-planned.

But we can see what happened in hindsight. So it was OK was it not? After all it was foretold by Jesus, in accordance with God's plan, and if not betrayed by Judas then something else would have to be done. Otherwise we would not have the Christian faith as we know it. So do we condemn Judas, praise God for using him as his instrument even if under Satan's control or just note that he was the Judas whose name has become synonymous with betrayal? The circumstances and betrayal and the characters involved are more complicated than we might like.

And what about the other disciples? What role did they play in the drama? Jesus is deeply troubled and actually says one of them will betray him. Peter eventually suggests that "the disciple who Jesus loved", should ask who it will be. It seems he is hesitant and cannot bring himself to ask the question directly. Is he afraid of the answer or he just afraid?

This disciple who is closest to Jesus, most likely John asks "Who is it Lord". Judas is then exposed and leaves but there is no mention of Peter or John's reaction. Although the disciples have argued over who it is will betray Jesus, the rest of the disciples don't seem to have a clue as to what is going on. What were Peter and John thinking? Should they have said or done something before it was too late? Were they guilty of the Edmund Burke quote that "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing" or were they so self-centred that " Their road to hell was paved with good intentions". On the face of it Judas went on to regret his betrayal so that he hanged himself in his newly acquired field. There is no mention of him seeking atonement beforehand. So were the other disciples complicit in Jesus's betrayal? Things were confused as well as dangerous. Eventually they went on to much greater things inspired by the Holy Spirit, but only after doubts and denials. It seems they did seek atonement for their earlier failings.

However afraid and doubting they were, without these flawed souls there would be no church to pass on the message from generation to generation. They were proved right not to jump to spontaneous action upon hearing Judas was going to betray Jesus. They were proved right to be afraid once the drama went up a gear and to lay low until the danger had past.

So if we betray someone the right thing is surely to seek atonement. If we are betrayed we have Jesus to follow and carry his cross without condemnation. However things are not always clear cut. If life seems difficult or confused and we think we might be inadvertently mixed up in something resembling betrayal, where there is resentment or anger or injustice or a sense of powerlessness we could do worse than follow Peter and John's example. As also flawed people, may be if we wait, absorb what is happening, avoid blame and pray for guidance we might work things out for the good of all concerned.