



Palm Sunday

“Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord” commemorates two dramatic public processions in the last week of Jesus of Nazareth. The Palm Sunday procession recalls His triumphant entry into Jerusalem to the wild acclaim of the people. The Passion procession exposes His humiliating exit from the city only days later to the place of crucifixion. In the one, Jesus rides in honor, carried on the back of a donkey; in the other, He stumbles and falls through the streets unsupported, weighed down by the heavy beam of repudiation the Romans make Him carry to His death.

These dramatic processions take place in full public view. But the Gospel writers also draw our attention to two less prominent processions the night of the Passion: that of Judas and that of Peter.

Judas left the Last Supper while it was still going on, guiltily distancing himself from Eucharistic communion and Apostolic unity. He “went out,” St. John tells us, to form a procession of betrayal to Gethsemani. For “it was night,” and he had to procure a band of soldiers and secure the details of Jesus’ arrest.

Every step Judas took toward that decisive kiss of identification sunk him deeper into the quicksand of conspiracy. Too late did he realize, “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.” “See to it yourself,” the chief priests advised. But Judas was not up to the task. He could neither

forgive nor justify. Throwing his thirty pieces of silver in the Temple, “he went and hanged himself.” The procession of betrayal leads to death.

Peter’s procession took him elsewhere—not to betrayal, but to denial. In the confusion after Jesus’ arrest, St. Mark says, Peter “followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest.” There he proceeded with increasing intensity three times to deny that he knew the man Who had called him from his fisherman’s boat and named him Rock of the Church. When the sound of the cockcrow pierced this mendacity, Peter “went out and wept bitterly.” His Passion procession ended in tears of repentance.

Where does mine end? Will I sell my faith for a price as Judas did? Can my loyalty to Christ be bought off with 30 pieces of silver? Or am I like Peter, bringing my procession to a halt “at a distance” from the Jesus the world judges? Do I fear guilt by association with the discredited King of the Jews? Do I rely on my own self-sufficient strength never to deny Him?

Judas-like betrayal or Petrine denial—two ways to “manage” the Passion of Christ. Judas actively handed Jesus over to His enemies; Peter got out of their way, escaped into the night, failed to stand with His Master in His hour of need. Judas brought about Jesus’ death; Peter didn’t try to stop it.

Lent brings forth another alternative. We find it in the words of Jesus in the Gospel of St. Luke: “Be vigilant at all times, and pray that you have the strength . . . to stand before the Son of Man.”