

## *Stupendous Love*

The Passion was the event when everything came together for the disciples. It was such an electrifying experience that the disciples told every detail, moment by moment. Even the scandalous parts. They described how Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Then, how Peter denied that he knew Jesus, when a servant-girl accused him of being a disciple. His arrogant claim to go to death with Jesus was shown to be paper thin.

When Jesus was arrested, Mark says of the disciples, ***“They all deserted him and ran away”*** (Mk. 14:50). Then he described in detail the abandonment of a young disciple. Mark wrote, ***“Now a young man followed him wearing nothing but a linen cloth... They seized him, but he left the cloth behind and ran away naked”*** (Mk. 14:51-52). Like us, this disciple wanted to be true to Jesus in the time of temptation. Yet, he gave in to fear, and he ran away in utter disgrace – naked!

As Mark told the story of Jesus’ Passion, why was he not afraid to tell the darkest sins of the disciples? He exposed their shame. He openly described their utter failure.

He also recounted the calculated plan of the Jewish leaders. The chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas – who committed murder – instead of releasing Jesus (Mk. 15:6-12). Pilate lacked integrity, justice, or any sense of the truth. Rather, he was a populist leader who only wanted to please the crowd. Mark said, ***“wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas... and handed Jesus over to be crucified”*** (Mk. 15:15). Another translation says, ***“Pilate, anxious to placate the crowd, released Barabbas.”***

The story of the Passion describes mankind as weak, unfaithful, or even corrupt. We see humanity at its worst, and Jesus at his best. As Jesus testified to the Sanhedrin that he is the Christ, the Son of God, outside in the courtyard Peter denied that he is a disciple. Jesus’ love is steadfast for those who betray, deny, abandon, or falsely accuse him.

How willingly he accepted his Passion! At the Last Supper, he perfectly expressed the mystery of his death by taking the cup and saying, ***“This is my blood of the covenant which will be shed for many”*** (Mk. 14:24). His steadfast love mesmerized the first Christians. As they looked back on Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, they were filled with certain faith in God’s love. It was an electrifying experience. Because of the Passion, the disciples had a complete conversion.

The Passion is transformative. Just as it transformed the first Christians, it can transform us. This week take time each day to reflect on the Passion. Each day re-read a small section and reflect on the salvation flowing from the cross. How Christ’s love conquers sin and death right now! While looking at the crucifix, behold in wonder the Lord Jesus who conquers the treacherous betrayal of mankind through the stupendous love of the cross.

Sitting at table with the Twelve, Jesus said, ***“One of you will betray me, one who is eating with me”*** (Mk. 14:18). This saying was vague, so each of the Twelve said, ***“Surely, it is not I?”*** (Mk. 14:19). We know that Jesus was talking about Judas, but he was also talking to all those eating with him. As we celebrate the Eucharist, we should always remember that Jesus was betrayed by one of the Twelve who ate with him at the Last Supper. The stories in the Gospel are also our stories. He addresses us when he says, ***“One of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.”***

Jesus continues to offer his Body and Blood to us, despite our sins. We gossip and betray one another almost daily. We fail to love Christ in the least among us – whether the unborn, sick, elderly, prisoner, or immigrant. We hold grudges, harbor anger, look with lust, and tell lies.

With full knowledge of our sinfulness, he keeps pouring out his love. In Baptism he washes us with the water flowing from his side. In Reconciliation he says, ***“Father, forgive them. They do not know what they do”*** (Lk. 23:34). In the Eucharist he says, ***“This is my Body given up for you”*** (Lk. 22:19). This week, marvel at his faithful persevering love. Let the stupendous love of the cross transform you.