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Homily for Wednesday in Holy Week, 2021  
Church of the Ascension.

In nomine+

One of the challenges of putting together a homily during Holy Week is trying to remain within the borders that our readings and the narrative of Our Lord's last days lay upon us. We all know the story so well that a compelling impetus toward the conclusion is truly hard to resist. But, it is the intention of our Holy Week liturgies, to slow us down so that we live these sacred and transformative events day by day and moment by moment, at a pace which is as near to their real time occurrence as possible and so gain a deeper understanding of the impact they have upon our spiritual lives.

Thus, looking at our Gospel for today, we cannot help but see it as arriving a day too early for this annual task. Isn't the betrayal of Judas supposed to take place on Maundy Thursday at the Last Supper? The answer, of course, is yes! The betrayal, the foot washing, the command to love one another the agony in the garden are all part of that fateful penultimate day. What then, can we find to separate Wednesday in Holy Week from all that went before and all that comes after? I think I may have found an answer. The piece of the narrative which stands out, today, apart from all the other pieces, is the betrayal of Judas.

In John's Gospel we are often presented with a Jesus who is different from the Jesus we see in the synoptic gospels. John's Jesus seems to be in possession of prescient knowledge, allowing him, not only to see the future, but also often to provide a context in which it is to be understood. This is true of today's Gospel, where we are shown a Jesus who literally sends Judas out to do the "preordained" betrayal that is so essential to the final apprehension, interrogation and execution of Our Lord, as we have come to know it. So it is this betrayal that I think we need to examine, tonight.

About twenty years ago, Malcolm Gladwell, a well-regarded author of many books and articles, published a book entitled, "The Tipping Point", in which he examined in well researched detail the social phenomena which occur when ideas, trends, movements, suddenly, and with little notice become undeniable realities with which we are required to reckon. He includes inexplicable changes in crime statistics, the emergence of fads, the cult of personality and its disappearance, to name only the smallest sample. If social media had been a part of our world at that time, I'm sure he would have included the example of the lowly meme suddenly becoming viral. His thesis is that in every unpredictable trend, movement, etc., more detailed analysis will reveal an occurrence from which the improbable became inevitable. His argument is most persuasive and it is that which has been influencing my thinking this evening.

It is my contention that the betrayal of Judas marks the tipping point in the familiar Passion Narrative. We can all point the various points in Our Savior's life where the trajectory of his life made a significant change. In Luke's Gospel it might be the point at which he "turned his face toward Jerusalem." In the other synoptics, it might have been the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, or the cleansing of the Temple, or any one of a number of choices that brought him the attention

of the authorities and raised the charge of sedition against him. But if we examine all these other momentous decisions, we can perceive what I'd like to call some wiggle room. They did not lock Jesus, inexorably, into a course from which there was no escape and would guarantee his tragic end.

However, with the decision, which he clearly made, to unleash Judas, Jesus knew and signaled that he was opening the doorway through which there was no way left to alter what lay ahead. The die was cast! This final mission of Judas would assure that he would be found and apprehended. And, once apprehended his fate would be sealed. The cross was unavoidable! His plea to have God remove this cup, was the only hope, and it was made in acquiescence to God's own will.

Yet, he did not hesitate to set these wheels in motion. Knowing what he would have to face, he persisted in doing his father's will, and Judas' betrayal was the tipping point. Such commitment can help us to deepen our understanding of his passion. I once heard passion described as the obsession that supersedes and prioritizes everything else, success, fame, well-being, even life, itself. Christ's passion for the work he was given to do was evident long before he arrived at Calvary or the upper room or the temple precincts or the gates of Jerusalem, or his visits to Bethany, and so on. His passion to bring salvation to the world drove his entire life. He only had to reach the tipping point for it to become evident to us all.

Amen.