

“Certainly we can be generous,” I said.

But how? That question just kept running through my mind. How? Unless ... unless I can “find” some money, so to speak. Wait! Do you suppose there’s any truth to that rumor, the rumor that the high priest wants to nab Jesus so badly that he will pay just to have someone identify where he is? That’s all he wants: just pick him out in a crowd.

It almost made me laugh. Easy money! So easy! I could, and I would. Why not? I didn’t want him killed, of course; last thing on my mind. But even if I pointed him out, I knew, they would not be able to take him. He had done it before, just walked right through the crowd, untouched.

“How much do you offer?” ... “Thirty pieces of silver.” ... “Good, good enough. Thirty pieces of silver. Done!” Yes! My problem was solved! I was safe!

Need I tell you more? The upper room ... the morsel dipped ... His words: “One of you will betray me.” How did he know? How could he know? — “Go,” he said. “Go quickly.” And I went. If it had only ended there, but there was more. That kiss. His words again: “Would you betray me with a kiss ... friend?” He knew!

AND THEY TOOK HIM! This is not the way it was to have ended. They took him, and I knew what they intended to do with him. It was beyond stopping now, like a boulder tumbling down a hill; no, more—an avalanche! And more ... and more ... and more!

“What have I done?” I cried. “I have betrayed innocent blood!” I threw the money down ... and realized ... my hands are empty now. I let go of my Lord to grasp for more ... and once I let that go as well ... there is nothing left to hold on to. Without Jesus, there is nothing left to hold on to. There is no ... more.

By Arden W. Mead. © 1996/2011 by Creative Communications for the Parish
www.creativecommunications.com. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA.

Photograph courtesy of Photos by Gum: www.photosbygum.com



Homily: Lent Week Two

Look at your hands. Those ten digits, dancing and bending, twisting and clenching. It is amazing, all of the things that they can do—from balancing an account or counting coins, to writing a check or filling the shelves of a food pantry. How do you use your hands in such matters?

Early in his tale “A Christmas Carol,” Charles Dickens described the character of Scrooge this way: “Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!” It’s surprising to note that Dickens used *hand language* to describe Scrooge, and then followed up the description with a conclusion, calling Scrooge a “covetous old sinner”—as though his hands were somehow an avenue to his heart. Look at your hands. Just look at them. What do they say? What do they say about *you*?

When Judas looked at his hands, what do you suppose he saw? Today, as we meet him in our weekly monolog, Judas looks into his hands and sees nothing—for the first time, perhaps, in his entire life. Nothing! And that—that emptiness—is his undoing.

Oh, those hands had been full before—full of money, even as his heart was full of power. Yet, it is a shame that Judas never quite got a hold on the point of Jesus’ presence in the world. Even with Christ so close at hand, Judas never opened his greedy fists to the very power of God.

C. S. Lewis once wrote that every human heart has a God-shaped hole. All of our lives are spent trying to fill that hole—with money, with power, with love and relationships ... you can fill in the blanks. Idolatry, after all, is alive and well in the twentieth century. Yet, trying to fill that hollow place with anything but Jesus Christ is like trying to put a square peg into a round hole. The result is unsatisfying at best—downright deadly at worst.

And I wonder if C. S. Lewis, while right, may not have been misdirected in his search for the God-shaped hole. Perhaps the hole is not in our hearts. Perhaps it is in our hands—the empty space that is left in the middle of our fists, even when we clench them with all our might.

As we listen to the words of Judas today, it may be a good time to hold our hands up against his—to examine our own wants and needs, and to see how tightly we might be clinging to those things which fill neither our hands nor our hearts.

And then, to hold our hands, empty now, and open, up to those hands that were pierced for us, so long ago, on that cross. We may find that, until our hands are clasped with his, they will always be empty.

Monologue: Judas

There is nothing in my hands. Nothing. There was money in my hands, 30 pieces of precious silver. But then I discovered that with that money there was MORE, more on my hands than I had reached for. There is blood on my hands, innocent blood. I have betrayed innocent blood! I let the money go—I threw it from my hands. And now there is nothing in my hands. I have nothing left to hold on to. I had hoped for so much more.

More. That was the problem, wasn't it? "Judas, why are you wasting your life in little Karioth? You are capable of so much ... more." They knew me well, my hometown friends and family. And they were right: I wanted more. "Try the city life," they said. That was all the prompting I needed. I went, and they were right again. The city was everything I had hoped for—and more. People, thousands of people, more people than I had ever seen before. And money, money to be made, more than little Karioth could ever comprehend. They were so easy, so innocent, such simple prey in the hands of someone who knew the right words, the right phrases. It was more than I had ever hoped ... but never quite enough.

And then another element arose, a chance for something even more. It's not that I desired money less. It was what I discovered about myself. It

wasn't the money. It was more: it was the POWER. The reason I craved money, I began to comprehend, was that money gave me POWER.

Perhaps that is how I fell in with them, with him. I saw an opportunity there for POWER—not through money, mind you, but through a movement, a movement that was catching the heart of the people and stirring them up with excitement. But it was more than the movement, finally; it was HIM. He was the cause. He came off as a simple, humble prophet—Jesus of Nazareth, a hometown as humble as my Karioth. But listen to the POWER of his words. What he was claiming to be bringing to the people was nothing less ... than the Kingdom of God! And ... he was calling for followers.

Could it be? What if this were the time, the time for the long-promised Kingdom to be restored? People—my family among them—have waited and hoped. Is now the time? Is this the way? Is the glory of David about to return? The Kingdom of God? Could I—dare I—take the chance, risk everything? For if it were ... and I were on the ground floor ... and if he truly brought it off—think of the possibilities! Personal privileges, prestige ... and power.

"Yes, I will help!" I made myself obvious to him. I followed him. I separated the crowd for him. And one day, he turned to me and said, "Friend, come; follow me!" I was in! I was one of the inner circle which became The Twelve. And we all caught the excitement of the possibilities: If this is the one ... all of us ... we will LEAD HIS KINGDOM!

We? When I looked around at the rest, it was obvious to me: With the possible exception of James and John, "the sons of thunder," I was the only one who showed any sign of real ambition, that drive that spells success and leadership. And when the job of handling the money came up ... who else but me?

Did I say, "Handling the money"? Maybe "mishandling" would be more accurate. Don't forget, I was no longer accustomed to a pauper's way of life. So, little by little, I used the money. Little by little ... and then a little more. So, when the rich women of Bethany made their donations—and others like them—it just didn't quite all get into the bag, if you know what I mean. And that was the beginning of my undoing.

Passover had arrived. It has been customary among us to give gifts to the poor at Passover. And when Peter asked, "Judas, how do we stand? Can we be generous this year?" I cringed. There was almost nothing left in the bag! Almost nothing. I didn't tell him that, though.