

March 20

Dinner with Sinners – The Love Feast

That is what was going on the night Jesus celebrated His last supper with His chosen disciples before He would be crucified. Jesus told His disciples that night, ***“You will all fall away because of Me this night....”*** (Matthew 26:31a). Every single disciple failed Him - and He knew they would. Yet He wanted to be with them that night (Luke 22:15). Remarkable.

We often grieve over our failures. Sometimes in hindsight, almost always in private, I recall a word I said, an action I took or did not take but should have, and it literally *pains my head* as I think about my idiocy, selfishness, block headedness, fear, as I meditate upon my self-hate and anger because of my failure. Unresolved sin, seriously considered, is often like torture. Guilt is designed to be a killer. (Ps. 32:3)

Jesus had selected each disciple, even Peter, even Judas. To have dinner with them, and *commune* with them, and then have them all abandon Him in His greatest hour of need. Did He bang His head against the wall? Was He rubbing His brow with some pained look and thinking, “I can’t believe I chose these buffoons! What was I thinking?!” No. Even their failures would find a purpose in the providence of God - for each of them personally, and for the future Church as a whole. Lessons of accountability, and for some, absolution.

Judas would selfishly choose to fulfill a prophecy he probably never even knew – that the Messiah would be sold for 30 pieces of silver. Zechariah prophesied that it was a ***“magnificent price.”*** (11:13) It was the price of a slave. Judas was a slave to his own desires. And he got to keep those 30 pieces as a reminder that he had betrayed the One he *knew* was the Messiah! This egregious variant of sin against the Holy Spirit was knowing Jesus is the Messiah, and yet denying that knowledge by acting in unbelief. Judas would also serve as a living [and dying] example of what ultimately happens to people who reject Jesus: hopelessness and everlasting loneliness.

Peter would deny Jesus. Peter, the one disciple favored over and over again with special audiences and privileges.... Jesus’ reward for that frequent favor? Threefold denial, spineless fear in the face of a servant girl. Peter verbally separated from the Man Who could always find the fish, and always find the sin... but would accept and forgive anyway. ***“Dammit! I don’t know the man!”*** So much for Jesus’ faithful friend. (Mt. 26:74)

John, like every other disciple, fled from the guards and priests who came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Later, John would turn and have enough courage to go back to the proximity of Jesus’ trial. A bit later, John would have the courage to be at the foot of the cross - identifying with Jesus along with some women and Jesus’ mother Mary.

These disciples of Jesus reflect the full spectrum of the Church: those who would join and leave – forever; those who would join and fail miserably, and yet repent and return to positions of faithful leadership; those who would stumble, and quickly rekindle their faith and courage. All sinners, in varying degrees. But Jesus “loved them to the end.” What a promise! He *wanted* to forgive them! And He wants to keep forgiving us! Come to the table! He knows all about You. He is not pained; only if you stay away, He is.

Prayer: *Lord, forgive my faith when it shrinks! Thank You for inviting me to dinner. You know I am a sinner. In contrition and joy, may I accept Your invitation to this love feast – where You have prepared a lavish banquet of forgiveness for me. Thank You for Your love! Let me feast upon it! Amen.*