

Judas and his band

Judas had not expected that his treason would have produced such fatal results. He had been anxious to obtain the promised reward, and to please the Pharisees by delivering up Jesus into their hands, but he had never calculated on things going so far, or thought that the enemies of his Master would actually bring him to judgment and crucify him; his mind was engrossed with the love of gain alone, and some astute Pharisees and Sadducees, with whom he had established an intercourse, had constantly urged him on to treason by flattering him. He was sick of the fatiguing, wandering, and persecuted life which the Apostles led. For several months past he had continually stolen from the alms which were consigned to his care, and his avarice, grudging the expenses incurred by Magdalen when she poured the precious ointment on the feet of our Lord, incited him to the commission of the greatest of crimes. He had always hoped that Jesus would establish a temporal kingdom, and bestow upon him some brilliant and lucrative post in it, but finding himself disappointed, he turned his thoughts to amassing a fortune. He saw that sufferings and persecutions were on the increase for our Lord and his followers, and he sought to make friends with the powerful enemies of our Saviour before the time of danger, for he saw that Jesus did not become a king, whereas the actual dignity and power of the High Priest, and of all who were attached to his service, made a very strong impression upon his mind. He began to enter by degrees into a close connection with their agents, who were constantly flattering him, and assuring him in strong terms that, in any case, an end would speedily be put to the career of our Divine Lord. He listened more and more eagerly to the criminal suggestions of his corrupt heart, and he had done nothing during the last few days but go backwards and forwards in order to induce the chief priests to come to some agreement. But they were unwilling to act at once, and treated him with contempt. They said that sufficient time would not intervene before the festival day, and that there would be a tumult among the people. The Sanhedrin alone listened to his proposals with some degree of attention. After Judas had sacrilegiously received the Blessed Sacrament, Satan took entire possession of him, and he went off at once to complete his crime. He in the first place sought those persons who had hitherto flattered and entered into agreements with him, and who still received him with pretended friendship.



Some others joined the party, and among the number Annas and Caiphas, but the latter treated him with considerable pride and scorn. All these enemies of Christ were extremely undecided and far from feeling any confidence of success, because they mistrusted Judas.

I saw the empire of Hell divided against itself; Satan desired the crime of the Jews, and earnestly longed for the death of Jesus, the Converter of souls, the holy Teacher, the Just Man, who was so abhorrent to him; but at the same time he felt an extraordinary interior fear of the death of the innocent Victim, who would not conceal himself from his persecutors. I saw him then, on the one hand, stimulate the hatred and fury of the enemies of Jesus, and on the other, insinuate to some of their number that Judas was a wicked; despicable character, and that the sentence could not be pronounced before the festival, or a sufficient number of witnesses against Jesus be gathered together. Everyone proposed something different, and some questioned Judas, saying: 'Shall we be able to take him? Has he not armed men with him?' And the traitor replied: 'No, he is alone with eleven disciples; he is greatly depressed, and the eleven are timid men.' He told them that now or never was the time to get possession of the person of Jesus, that later he might no longer have it in his power to give our Lord up into their hands, and that perhaps he should never return to him again, because for several days past it had been very clear that the other disciples and Jesus himself suspected and would certainly kill him if he returned to them. He told them likewise that if they did not at once seize the person of Jesus, he would make his escape, and return with an army of his partisans, to have himself proclaimed King. These threats of Judas produced some effect, his proposals were acceded to, and he received the price of this treason—thirty pieces of silver. These pieces were oblong, with holes in their sides, strung together by means of rings in a kind of chain, and bearing certain impressions.

Judas could not help being conscious that they regarded him with contempt and distrust, for their language and gestures betrayed their feelings, and pride suggested to him to give back the money as an offering for the Temple, in order to make them suppose his intentions to have been just and disinterested. But they rejected his proposal, because the price of blood could not be offered in the Temple. Judas saw how much they despised him, and his rage was excessive. He had not expected to reap the bitter fruits of his treason even before it was accomplished, but he had gone so far with these men that he was in their power, and escape was no longer possible. They watched him carefully, and would not let him leave their presence, until he had shown them exactly what steps were to be taken in order to secure the person of Jesus. Three Pharisees accompanied him when he went down into a

room where the soldiers of the Temple (some only of whom were Jews, and the rest of various nations) were assembled. When everything was settled, and the necessary number of soldiers gathered together, Judas hastened first to the supper-room, accompanied by a servant of the Pharisees, for the purpose of ascertaining whether Jesus had left, as they would have seized his person there without difficulty, if once they had secured the doors. He agreed to send them a messenger with the required information.

A short time before when Judas had received the price of this treason, a Pharisee had gone out, and sent seven slaves to fetch wood with which to prepare the Cross for our Saviour, in case he should be judged, because the next day there would not be sufficient time on account of the commencement of the Paschal festivity. They procured this wood from a spot about three-quarters of a mile distant, near a high wall, where there was a great quantity of other wood belonging to the Temple, and dragged it to a square situated behind the tribunal of Caiphas. The principal piece of the Cross came from a tree formerly growing in the Valley of Josaphat, near the torrent of Cedron, and which, having fallen across the stream, had been used as a sort of bridge. When Nehemias hid the sacred fire and the holy vessels in the pool of Bethesda, it had been thrown over the spot, together with other pieces of wood,—then later taken away, and left on one side. The Cross was prepared in a very peculiar manner, either with the object of deriding the royalty of Jesus, or from what men might term chance. It was composed of five pieces of wood, exclusive of the inscription. I saw many other things concerning the Cross, and the meaning of different circumstances was also made known to me, but I have forgotten all that. Judas returned, and said that Jesus was no longer in the supper-room, but that he must certainly be on Mount Olivet, in the spot where he was accustomed to pray. He requested that only a small number of men might be sent with him, lest the disciples who were on the watch should perceive anything and raise a sedition. Three hundred men were to be stationed at the gates and in the streets of Ophel, a part of the town situated to the south of the Temple, and along the valley of Millo as far as the house of Annas, on the top of Mount Sion, in order to be ready to send reinforcements if necessary, for, he said, all the people of the lower class of Ophel were partisans of Jesus. The traitor likewise bade them be careful, lest he should escape them—since he, by mysterious means, had so often hidden himself in the mountain, and made himself suddenly invisible to those around. He recommended them, besides, to fasten him with a chain, and make use of certain magical forms to prevent his breaking it. The Jews listened to all these pieces of advice with scornful indifference, and replied, ‘If we once have him in our hands, we will take care not to let him go.’

Judas next began to make his arrangements with those who were to accompany him. He wished to enter the garden before them, and embrace and salute Jesus as if he were returning to him as his friend and disciple, and then for the soldiers to run forward and seize the person of Jesus. He was anxious that it should be thought they had come there by chance, that so, when they had made their appearance, he might run away like the other disciples and be no more heard of. He likewise thought that, perhaps, a tumult would ensue, that the Apostles might defend themselves, and Jesus pass through the midst of his enemies, as he had so often done before. He dwelt upon these thoughts especially, when his pride was hurt by the disdainful manner of the Jews in his regard; but he did not repent, for he had wholly given himself up to Satan. It was his desire also that the soldiers following him should not carry chains and cords, and his accomplices pretended to accede to all his wishes, although in reality they acted with him as with a traitor who was not to be trusted, but to be cast off as soon as he had done what was wanted. The soldiers received orders to keep close to Judas, watch him carefully, and not let him escape until Jesus was seized, for he had received his reward, and it was feared that he might run off with the money, and Jesus not be taken after all, or another be taken in his place. The band of men chosen to accompany Judas was composed of twenty soldiers, selected from the Temple guard and from others of the military who were under the orders of Annas and Caiphas. They were dressed very much like the Roman soldiers, had morions (crested metal helmets) like them, and wore hanging straps round their thighs, but their beards were long, whereas the Roman soldiers at Jerusalem had whiskers only, and shaved their chins and upper lips. They all had swords, some of them being also armed with spears, and they carried sticks with lanterns and torches; but when they set off they only lighted one. It had at first been intended that Judas should be accompanied by a more numerous escort, but he drew their attention to the fact that so large a number of men would be too easily seen, because Mount Olivet commanded a view of the whole valley. Most of the soldiers remained, therefore, at Ophel, and sentinels were stationed on all sides to put down any attempt which might be made to release Jesus. Judas set off with the twenty soldiers, but he was followed at some distance by four archers, who were only common bailiffs, carrying cords and chains, and after them came the six agents with whom Judas had been in communication for some time. One of these was a priest and a confidant of Annas, a second was devoted to Caiphas, the third and fourth were Pharisees, and the other two Sadducees and Herodians. These six men were courtiers of Annas and Caiphas, acting in the capacity of spies, and most bitter enemies of Jesus.

The soldiers remained on friendly terms with Judas until they reached the spot where the road divides the Garden of Olives from the Garden of Gethsemani, but there they refused to allow him to advance alone, and entirely changed their manner, treating him with much insolence and harshness.