

Today we heard the story of the passion and death of Jesus, a death he endured for us. If there is ever a moment in our lives when we are aware of our own unworthiness, it is surely right after we have heard the words of this gospel.

If there was ever a time when we could feel deep inside ourselves that we could do better, it is surely now!

But the gospel is not meant to be heard so that we may leave here with our heads bent low in shame, it is read so that we may understand instead how much God loves us and use that understanding to promise ourselves to do better to return that love.

There are two very human characters in this gospel and what they went through is worth reflecting on because these two people represent all of us. The first is Judas and the second is Peter.

Judas has been known throughout history as the man who betrayed Jesus. Psychologists and writers tell us he is a classic example of so many of the contradictions in our human nature.

Judas is a man who combines meanness of character, a greed for money with a desire for greatness, a greed for power. He saw Jesus as his ticket to both. By being one of the chosen disciples, he thought he would be very powerful when Jesus became King.

He was disappointed by Jesus because Jesus was not looking for power or glory but only to serve.

Judas was disappointed in God because the person of Jesus was not the kind of powerful God Judas wanted. So he turned his back on Jesus and he betrayed him for money and so that he would be ready when the next powerful figure came along.

What about Peter? He has been known throughout history as the first pope, the father of the church, the one who first proclaimed Jesus as the messiah but we forget that he betrayed Jesus too!

In the garden when the guards showed up and Jesus let himself be arrested, Peter ran away, and in the courtyard of the high priest he stayed far away from Jesus and even though he had been warned that he would, he still denied Jesus three times. He betrayed Jesus from fear, too cowardly to risk getting into trouble!

So what is the difference between the two? Why are they remembered so differently in history when both of them betrayed the Lord?

The difference is that even in his deepest shame, Peter came back. Judas did not! Peter came back to the Lord and Judas took his own life. Peter trusted that God would forgive him and Judas felt that he could never be forgiven!

Peter understood that Jesus gave his life for a reason, and that reason was our salvation and unless we come back to him, his sacrifice would be for nothing. Judas gave up hope and only saw Jesus death as the end of everything.

Who are we today? We are both of them. We have betrayed Jesus and rejected him every time we act selfishly and every time we act out of fear and refuse to trust the Lord, we are Judas and we are Peter. But what will we choose next? Will our shame drive away our hope and turn us away from the church as Judas did? Will our hope bring us back to do great things like Peter did?

Peter received the first communion at the last supper while Judas left early and did not. Receiving the body of Jesus helped Peter have the strength to come back to Jesus even after he failed.

We have the chance today, even in our sorrow for the suffering that Christ endured for us to come forward and receive from him, his greatest gift, his own body and blood in holy communion.

We can leave here today, not weighed down with guilt but lifted up with hope, not crushed by sadness but full of the knowledge that Christ rose from the dead and all our betrayals are forgotten if we only turn back to him again.