

# FRIEND OF MINE

Robert Nash, S.J.

All His life long Jesus Christ had been trying to make men know Him. Shortly before the end He rode in triumph into Jerusalem. The streets and the archways re-echoed with cheering, for the people had formed themselves into a procession, and were shouting themselves hoarse. "Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." They thronged close about the Prophet and waved palm branches and spread their garments on the ground for Him to walk on. Today His enemies are filled with impotent rage. They are out of the picture; the whole world is gone after Him.

## Jesus Unknown.

So slow had the Master been about making a beginning of the foundation of His Kingdom that even His disciples had chafed at the delay. But this day marks a welcome change. Today the crowds are acclaiming Him King and He does not prevent them. On the contrary, He declares that if they were silent, the very stones of the street would cry out. Today, then, He sets Himself at the head of His people to lead them to victory. Hated Rome shall lie in the dust before His triumphant advance, and once more Jerusalem will be able to lift her head high and take pride of place before the nations of the world as capital of Christ's Kingdom. Wherefore, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!

Thus pleasingly did they muse as they walked along. But presently the picture was rudely jolted out of focus. A short distance outside the city Christ halts, and they turn around to look in His direction. They are suddenly surprised, suddenly apprehensive. For they see that while every face about Him is radiant with happiness, tears dim the eyes of Jesus. Hope surges high in every other breast, but the Heart of Christ is weighed down with sorrow. For, though this morning they are all ac-claiming Him their King, He knows that in a few days they will yell like wild beasts for His blood. Today it is "Hosanna!", on Friday it will be "Crucify Him." In spite of all their enthusiasm they do not know Him, these thoughtless multitudes around Him. And Jesus wept on Palm Sunday, His day of triumph, because Jerusalem "did not know the day of her visitation."

But it was not only the rabble who failed to know Christ. On the following Thursday night He has His own twelve all to Himself, at the Last Supper. Though it is a festive gathering, the same sad complaint forces itself to His lips. These twelve are His closest friends; for three years they have been near Him; side by side they have worked and prayed and slept and eaten and drank and spoken intimately together, and now, after it all, even they do not know Him. Their ideas about Him and His Kingdom and His mission are all distorted. He is sorely disappointed that they are so slow of heart. "So long a time have I been with you, and you have not known Me!" His own twelve! And lifting up His eyes to the Father, He prays for them: ". . . that they may know Thee, the one true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent."

\* \* \*

A man was kneeling in prayer in a dark cave. In his countenance there shone a brilliant light; it was the reflection of the burning love for Christ that was glowing in that man's heart. Through a life of prayer and sacrifice this man had come to know Christ intimately, and the knowledge had transformed him. He had turned his back on a soldier's career because Christ had worked and died for souls, and he wanted to do the same. Christ was poor; this man had given away his last coin and was now living on alms. Christ prayed and fasted; since he came here to this cave he, too, has fasted and prayed. But with all this his love is not yet satisfied. A great prayer forms itself in the heart of that great man, and springs to his lips: "Lord, that I may know Thee more clearly still, in order that I may love Thee more dearly and follow Thee more nearly."

## Manresa.

And Ignatius Loyola came out of Manresa to tell the world what he had found in that cave. There he had come to know

Christ, and so stunned was he at the discovery that he could know no rest. That knowledge brought him love for Christ, and the fire of personal love for Jesus of Nazareth drove him out into the world obsessed with a craving to share his secret with others. The knowledge and love of Jesus Christ had so revolutionised his whole outlook, he now saw so clearly the foolhardiness of all else, that the indifference of the world to Christ and the utter blindness to His love made him yearn to spend himself unreservedly on the task of teaching to men this Christ Whom he had found. So he gathered a band of followers around him into whom he fused his own passionate devotion to Christ and His cause, and then he scattered them to the four corners of the earth, giving them one only command: "Go and set the whole world on fire with the love of Jesus Christ."

That is what happened to Ignatius Loyola when once he came to know Christ. Our object in these pages is to look upon one trait of the infinitely beautiful character of that same Christ. Even this may help to a deeper knowledge of Him, and it is not possible to know Him and withhold one's love and one's eagerness to imitate Him.

There is a whole world of difference between knowing Christ and knowing about Christ. If a man is interested, let us say, in some branch of science, he may know much about an eminent scientist who lives at the antipodes. He knows all the facts of the man's life—where he was born, what studies he has pursued, the countries he has visited, the books he has written, the chain of circumstances that led him to settle down in a distant country. But the man himself he does not know until he meets him face to face.

Now it is the intensest yearning of Jesus to make men know Him in this intimate way. He is ever trying to make contact with them, and to let them understand that when He tells them His Sacred Heart is on fire with love for them He is not using the language of metaphor, but is stating the simple truth.

### **The Key to Christ.**

Love is, perhaps, the trait of Our Lord's character that first impresses itself upon our minds as soon as we begin to know Him. This is to be expected, for proofs of that love crowd into every page, one might almost say into every line, of the Gospel story. There He holds up for us to look at, a Heart throbbing with a love which is the very embodiment of sincerity. So astonishingly genuine is His love; so solid and unshaken and unchanged does it stand in face of the assaults of treachery and falsehood; so completely does it efface the memory of the cowardice, the pettiness, the selfishness, the crimes even, of the sinner who falls down on his knees and asks to be forgiven; so exultant is it when men at last begin to get a small glimpse of its reality, and so keenly disappointed when they will not believe in it; so eager is it to make every allowance and to discover every excuse: in a word, so immeasurably beyond the ambit of our small minds to fathom, or our halting speech to utter, is this wonderful thing, the love of Christ for men, that the saints — they who best "learned Christ"—have made language yield up all her treasures of eloquence in the effort to tell us about it. And with what result? Why, only to lay down their pens and confess that they despair of the task. Only to proclaim that that love is a luminary so bright that it stands out apart, quite on its own, dwarfing all human love, or, rather, taking into itself everything there is in human love of beauty and of truth, and excluding every taint of the selfishness by which human love is often marred. The fact is that there is no finding of words adequately to expose the treasures of love for men that are contained in Christ's Sacred Heart. Prayer opens wide the door of that treasure-house; the earnest seeker knocks and is given admission; he looks around in astonishment, and gradually two truths break in on his mind.

The first of these is that God is love. St. John learned that when he leaned close to Christ's Heart at the Last Supper. When, later, he wanted to sum up all God's attributes—His eternity, His justice, His awful sanctity, His infinite perfection—he chose love as being the best epitome of them all. "God is love," and the soul of prayer makes that its first discovery. But even more astonishing still is the second truth. All this wealth of love of God is waiting to be poured out on each individual who finds his way to this treasure-house. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." "He loved me," writes St. Paul, "and He delivered Himself up for me."

### **Forgiveness.**

Certain it is that this fire of Our Lord's love shines out most brilliantly when it gathers into itself the sorrowful heart of the prodigal, and makes him realise that its flames have completely burned up every trace and every memory of his sin. The soul then understands that Our Lord fulfils, as no one ever did, as no one ever shall, that fine definition of a friend—a man who knows everything about me, and loves me just the same. The welcome back springs spontaneously from the Sacred Heart. There is no censure, no complaint, no aloofness, no formality. It is no time for formality when the welcoming Christ is overflowing with joy that His child is be-gin-ning at last to understand the utter truth of His love. And it is just at this moment, too, when the sinner stands be-fore this forgiving Christ, stands and looks at his own selfishness and his meanness, that he best appreciates Our Lord's generosity in forgetting all about it. Of course, he is forgiven; he knows quite well he is. But he has deliberately hurt a Friend, and the remembrance of his ingratitude and the pain he has caused burns into his brain and brings to his eyes tears of sweet repentance. In the light of his sin he understands better than ever before how much Christ loves him. The very sincerity of the welcome back serves only to bring, hot from the heart, acts of sorrow and protestations that he is fixed in his determination to efface the past by a life of utter loyalty to that Friend in future. This is how this extraordinary Lover of men takes the sinner's load of crimes from his shoulders, and from it welds, all the stronger and closer, the golden chain binding the sinner's heart to the Sacred Heart. Christ will make of even his very sins, stepping-stones to higher things.

Saint Peter learned this, and the story of his schooling is a drama in three acts.

### **Three Chapters.**

Peter and the others are seated with the Master at the Last Supper. Our Lord is sad tonight, and, to these friends of His, "His own," He reveals part of the cause of His sadness. For the last time, He knows it, He is in the midst of His own whom He loves so well. He is longing to make them understand Him, to give them at least some insight into the affection He has for them. Above all, He wants them to be loyal to Him. He wants to be able to lean on them for support during this terrifying Passion that is about to break in on Him to-night. But they are going to fail Him, and He knows it. He looks around the table sadly, looks from Peter to John, from John to Andrew, and so round about the entire group. Quite quietly, quite deliberately, He stretches out both hands in a comprehensive gesture, and, including the whole twelve, He tells them: "All you shall be scandalised in Me this night. One of you will even betray Me. . . . The hand of the traitor is with Me on the table."

For a moment they are struck dumb with horror and surprise. Scandalised in Him! Ashamed of Him! Traitors! Never would that be said of them, His very own, chosen out of the whole world. The Master must surely be mistaken. They can trust them-selves that much at least, that they know they love Him and are ready to follow Him even to suffering and to death. Especially is Peter's generous heart chilled at the suggestion. "Lord," he says, when at length he finds his speech, though still his voice is hoarse under the strong emotion, "Lord, I will never be scandalised in Thee. The other eleven? Well, they, perhaps. But Peter? Lord, depend on Peter! Even though all should be scandalised, yet not I." He means it, indeed, but the Lord knew Peter. "Peter," He tells him, "the cock will not crow till thou deny Me three times." This is piling agony upon agony and Peter cannot believe. It is not possible. And he spoke the more vehemently: "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee to prison and to death. Even though I should die together with Thee, I will never deny Thee." And in like manner spoke all His disciples.

### **Danger!**

A few hours elapse and the scene changes to the barrack-yard outside the palace of Caiphias. Our Lord has been arrested down in Gethsemane and dragged through the street, and now He is inside, standing His trial before Annas. The night is cold, and out here in the yard the soldiers gather round the fire to discuss the latest happenings. They have secured this Man Christ at last. For a long time He has been a source of trouble to the authorities, but to-night will seal His fate. What chance has He between the cunning Annas and the unscrupulous Caiphias? Indeed, truth to tell, on other occasions

He had made away and nobody seemed able to tell how. But tonight they have made sure of His capture. Where so many others had failed they have succeeded, and they hope their masters will not forget that for them. Al-though, when all was said and done, the night's work had been a simple enough task. There had been practically no resistance, for the Man's friends had scampered away at the first sign of danger. One of them, indeed, had made some show of defence. In a sudden flare of zeal and anger he had drawn a sword, but presently the flare had died down again, and he, too, had deserted his Master and had run off with the others.

In this strain the conversation continues —the men sitting there with their hands spread out towards the grateful blaze of the fire, and regaling themselves at intervals with a draught from the bottles dangling from their belts. And, of all the people in the world, seated there, right in the midst of these soldiers, is Simon Peter —his face white with fear, his heart in his breast frozen with terror lest they notice him. What they are saying is true indeed. He it was who had drawn that sword and afterwards had run away when he saw the Master a Prisoner. He had retraced his steps, however, and, sorrowful and ashamed of his cowardice, he had succeeded in gaining admission to this courtyard, whence he might follow Jesus afar off and see the end. But now misery is eating into his very soul. What a fool he has been! Better never to have come back! Why did he not remain in safety with the others! Instead, in his impetuous way, he has rushed into the jaws of danger. He has had the foolhardiness to come into this place where he can do nothing at all to help the Master, and where every moment he is incurring the risk of being himself suspected and imprisoned. He must watch his chance and make good his escape before it is too late.

### **The Link Broken.**

His thoughts are rudely interrupted. Clear and loud above the coarse mutterings of the men rings out the shrill note of a girl's voice. "Why," she cries, "here is the very man you are talking about. Here is the friend of your Christ who drew his sword down in the garden." And she points an accusing finger in the direction of the apostle. For one agonising moment fear for himself and love for his Master have a fierce struggle in Peter's heart. He stands still, with head bent, undecided, quite taken by surprise. But already they are gathering around him and scrutinising his features more closely in the glare of the firelight. He must save himself at all costs. "It's a lie," he mutters. "I do not know Whom you are talking about! I never met the Man in my life."

But they are not to be put off so easily. "A lie!" they repeat mockingly. "No, friend of Christ, if there is a lie it is on your side. Why, even your very accent betrays you that you are a Galilean. And did we not see you in the garden with Him?" Peter dare not gainsay these arguments, and so he has recourse to cursing and swearing. Three several times he declares he knows nothing of this Christ of theirs, and then, cloaking his fear under show of indignation, he rushes from the fireplace and his accusers, determined to get away at once before there is any more trouble. Hisses of contempt follow him, and the men hurl after him their threats and their scoffs. And Peter, still cursing and swearing that he knows not the Man, hurries from them in feigned rage, and makes straight for the gate of the courtyard.

### **"The Lord Turning."**

He has about two-thirds of the way covered between the fire and the gate when all at once he stops dead and stands staring blankly before him like a man changed into a block of marble. What has happened to mesmerise him like this? At the farther end of the yard there is a balcony leading from the house of Annas to the house of Caiphas, and, just at that very moment, Our Lord is being led across. For a few seconds only, their eyes met—the eyes of Jesus and the eyes of Peter. "And the Lord, turning, looked at Peter." There is a whole world of pathos in the evangelist's simple words. That look of Christ seemed to choke Peter's heart with sorrow. Light shone down from those eyes of Christ and penetrated into the deep places of Peter's soul. It was like the flash of lightning that dazzles one in the midst of a black night.

In an instant the flash was over, but it had lasted long enough to show the whole horrible truth to Peter. He had betrayed his Friend! He, Peter, who had been so loud in his protestations of loyalty only a few hours ago! Peter, who had left all things to follow Christ! Peter, for whom Our Lord had prayed especially that his faith might not fail! Peter, who

was to con-firm his brethren, to be their prop and their model! Peter, to whom had been made that promise that he should be lifted up to the high eminence of head of Christ's Church! Peter had betrayed Christ! All Christ's lovable ways stand out in his memory more lovable than ever now in the light of Peter's fall—His patience, His thoughtfulness, His unfailing courtesy, His unselfishness. And Peter had betrayed Him! Not once either, but many times! And not by a simple denial, but with cursing and swearing that he never knew Him! And till because of the accusation of a whimpering servant-girl! The remorse of it! Such a Friend betrayed! And by such an apostle! And for such a reason! Echoes start suddenly in the maddened brain. "Even though all should deny Thee. "I am ready to go with Thee to prison and to death. "I will never be scandalised. . . "And the Lord turning, looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word which the Lord had spoken: 'Before the cock crow, thou wilt deny Me three times.' And going out he wept bitterly."

The clouds of the Passion have rolled away. It is early morning. Peter and the others have been out in their little smack all night fishing the waters of the lake. It has been a wearisome night of labour, casting their nets and hauling them up again, and they are very tired.

### **Absolution.**

As they draw near, in the first grey streaks of dawn, the figure of a Man is just discernible standing on the seashore. They take no notice of Him at first, pre-occupied as they are, tugging at the oars, and eager to reach home and secure their much-needed food and rest. But that Figure on the shore has attracted the attention of John. He peers intently out over the side of the boat, and then, reassured, he bends down and whispers into Peter's ear. "That disciple, therefore, whom Jesus loved, said to Peter: 'It is the Lord.'" Peter's heart gives a bound of joy. Nets, boat, tackle, the labours of the night, his weariness and hunger — straightaway all these fall from his mind. One thought only obsesses him—Jesus is there, standing on the shore, and Peter must get to Him. The boat is too slow. Indeed, they have not far to go, but Peter's impetuous love cannot be held in check. "Peter, therefore, when he heard that it was the Lord, girt his coat about him and cast himself into the sea" to come to Jesus.

Then follows a scene so lovely that any words used to reproduce it must seem almost a desecration. The rays of the morning sun just beginning to peep out of the east; the majestic Figure of the Christ, standing there on the white sand at the edge of the water; the little waves stealing in and breaking only a small distance away from His sandalled feet; and, on his knees before Him, Peter, his clothes dripping with the water of the lake, slipping his great rough seaman's hands into the white hands of Christ, and stammering out his profession of love with all the simplicity of a little child. There is no embarrassment in Peter. He knows Jesus too well. Of course, everything is all right; the old loving relations are fully restored. Not only does Our Lord forgive, but Peter is quite sure that He will receive him in such a way that nobody looking on would suspect that He even knew about that terrible triple denial on Thursday night.

### **'Thou Knowest All.'**

But himself? Ah, he had inflicted a smarting wound on the Heart of a Friend

Who never had an equal. And a great sorrow and a great love and a big resolve to undo the past surge up in Peter's heart as he kneels here and grasps firmly the hands of the Master. And, once again, "the Lord turning, looks at Peter." "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" Peter looks up, and this time he gazes steadily into the eyes of Christ. "Yes, Lord, I do love Thee, indeed." A second time the same question: "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" And a second time the same avowal. "Love Thee, Lord? Why, of course I love Thee." Still a third time: "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" And Peter is grieved. Is it possible that the Master doubts his love, seeing that He questions him thus three several times? More vehemently he declares it now. "Lord, dost Thou wish me to reassure Thee of my love? Lord, Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love Thee." A triple declaration of love to blot out for ever his triple denial, and the repentant Peter is lifted from his feet and raised to the highest pinnacle of greatness and honour that the loving Christ can find. "Feed My lambs; feed My sheep." The first Vicar of Christ on earth is Peter, who denied Him, but repented of his sin. Such is the love of Christ.

Peter never knew Our Lord so well as when he had caused Him pain. He knew Christ best in the infinitely tactful, infinitely gentle, infinitely forgiving, infinitely loving welcome back given him that morning on the seashore. He had found Jesus Christ to be a friend—a Man Who knew everything about him and loved him just the same. He looked up into the eyes of Christ, and it was good to know that he was trusted still. And the Face of Christ is radiant, for He has found a man who is beginning to understand the sincerity of His love. The light in Christ's Face blots out for Peter the brilliance of the morning sun, and he looks up wistfully and reads there the story of a love so great that words are only poor, feeble instruments to express it, a friendship so utterly genuine that no treachery or falsehood can alter it.

### **A Festering Sore.**

Among the twelve at the supper-table that night, a man was sitting in whose heart a secret was festering like a horrible sore. Judas Iscariot was a sensible, hard-headed man of the world who had found Christ and His ideals to be a disappointment. Everything had looked so promising two years ago. Christ's name was on everybody's lips then, and the crowds followed Him everywhere. Judas, too, had begun to take an interest in the Man. People were saying that He had come to found a kingdom, to restore the splendour of the ancient Jews. There was no denying that the Man had a wonderful power—there was power in His words to draw the multitudes; in His touch there was power, for with his own eyes Judas had seen lepers cleansed by that touch, sight restored, even the dead raised to life. Then He had the majestic bearing befitting a King. Perhaps there was truth in the re-ports that were current about Him, and, if so, Judas would want to be on the Man's side, for he loved power dearly, and he worshipped money for the power it put into men's hands.

So Judas had become more and more interested in this Man, Jesus of Nazareth, and more favourably disposed to listen to His teaching. Accordingly, he had been vastly pleased that morning two years ago when Jesus had singled him out of the multitude to be His special disciple. The scene was still fresh in his memory. Jesus had spent a day by the shore of Lake Genesareth, and from every side the crowds had gathered and thronged about Him. They brought to Him all that were sick, those possessed by devils, lunatics, palsied. And He, laying His hands upon them, cured them all. "Power went out from Him," the evangelist was to write later—that power coveted by Judas, who was scanning every movement of Christ. That night Jesus went up the mountainside alone to pray—it was often His custom at the end of a day—and next morning the multitudes gathered again. And Christ, standing there before them on the brow of the hill, looked out over them, indicating clearly that He had some special concern this morning. Twelve men are called aside from the crowd; one by one, in His quiet, deliberate way, He selects them Himself, mentioning each one by name and assigning to each his place near Him. Henceforth, these are to be "His own." Presently they sit down, Jesus and the twelve, and with the multitude facing Him and His twelve, Jesus opens His mouth and begins to teach. And amongst the twelve names called that day was that of Judas Iscariot.

For a while he had sat there by the Master's side, proud that he had been chosen so, and fully conscious that the eyes of many were fixed upon him with a holy envy. But all at once his complacency receives a shock. Jesus is speaking to the crowds, and what is this Judas hears? "Blessed are the poor in spirit. . . . Woe to you that are rich!" The words jar harshly on the ears of Judas. He had dreamed of a wealthy kingdom in which he would wield power, but here is the Founder of the Kingdom advocating poverty and denouncing riches as a snare and a danger-trap. Already his fears are awakened that there is something wrong.

### **Disillusioned!**

Throughout the two years all Christ's teaching has been consistent with this sermon on the Mount. Consistently He has told His followers to expect and to love poverty and suffering; to despise what the world values most highly, and to look for their reward, not in this world, which is only a passing show, but to "lay up treasure in heaven where neither rust nor moth can consume nor thieves break through and steal." Gradually it becomes more and more clear to Judas that he has made a mistake. And lately there has been even a more serious development, for Christ has lashed with merciless rigour the Pharisees and the Scribes—the very men who hold the power! He has pursued them with relentless logic, and has

unmasked their hypocrisy before all the people. Of course, they are enraged, and everybody knows they are only seeking an excuse to put Him to death. Yes, Judas made the mistake of his life when he took up with this Man. Jesus of Nazareth. But is the mistake irretrievable? He is indeed on the losing side for the moment, but a skilful and swift move can save him still—perhaps.

Dare he take that move? For at first he is horrified by the mere suggestion, and he rejects it. But, for all that, it comes back again another day, and this time it seems not quite so horrible after all. Judas looks at the idea, and, in a hazy kind of way, begins remotely to think out ways and means. Perhaps the thing is just feasible. Anyhow, the facts are that Judas wants money very badly; that for two whole years he has followed about after Jesus, Who is now clearly proved a visionary, and for his pains he has been told to love poverty and insult! He has had enough of such unsavoury doctrine. On the other hand, there are the Chief Priests, the Pharisees and the Scribes, the men with money, influence, and power. And these are Christ's implacable enemies. No doubt about it, if they could discover a man willing to hand over this Jesus to them, they would pay him handsomely. Was it not a chance for Judas, who knew every move of the Master? An opportunity of recompensing himself for the disappointments and losses of the past two years?

### **Playing With Fire.**

But conscience? Well, what of conscience? Judas has sense enough to know that there are times when a man has to brush aside these petty conscientious scruples. Besides, he remembers that before this attempts had been made to effect the capture, but Jesus had passed through His enemies in some unaccountable fashion. It is quite possible that the same is going to happen this time, too, but not until Judas has had his money! Anyhow, there can be no great harm in approaching the Chief Priests and finding out what their offer would be. Not that he is going to clinch a bargain with them! He will just throw out a leading question to give them a hint of what is passing in his mind, and see how far they would be willing to go.

That decision once taken, the remaining chapters in Judas' story follow in rapid succession. That night, under cover of darkness, the wretched man slips down the street and knocks at the door of the Chief Priest's house. It is opened, and Judas is admitted to the chamber where Annas and Caiphaz and the other great men are holding council. It is the interminable question—how are they going to silence for ever this fearless Christ, Who is destroying their prestige with the people? They are frankly surprised to see Judas, a known disciple of the Man they hate. What can Judas want with them, and at this hour? He has no time for apologies or introductions, for he has been driven in here by a restless hankering for something, anything almost, other than Christ. Christ is not enough for Judas; Christ is a disappointment to Judas; what can Judas get instead of Christ? That is his quest tonight. "What will you give me," he blurts out, "and I will betray Him?"

They are taken aback. This was more than they had hoped for in their wildest dreams. Is there any mistaking Judas' meaning? They observe him shrewdly, and the lips twitching with nervous excitement and the eyes glowing with greed reassure them. In such a place and at such a time. "Him" can only mean Jesus, but that hallowed name is stifled in the throat of the traitor apostle.

### **Treachery.**

Sure of their ground now, and recovered somewhat from the first shock of surprise, it is only with an effort that they succeed in controlling their delight. Why, if Judas can guarantee his side of the bargain, they are willing to go to almost any price. But they are not going to say so all at once, for they are careful Jews, and if they can have the capture effected at a low figure, why pay more than they need? What would Judas say to thirty pieces of silver? That was quite a fair sum. He would recall that it was the price laid down in their book of Exodus as the price to be paid to a master if his slave was injured. And Judas, dazzled by the glitter of the silver, sweeps the coins into his wallet and signs the promise that he will hand Christ over to them. "And from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him in the absence of the multitude."

That is the horrible secret that is raging in the miserable man's breast as he sits tonight at table with Jesus and the other

eleven. Ever since he struck that fatal bargain he has been ill at ease in this company. And now, as Jesus, in His quiet, deliberate way, begins to speak to them, His words strike the ears of Judas like a thunderbolt. "All of you will be scandalised in Me this night. . . . The hand of him that will betray Me is with Me on the table. . . . The Son of Man indeed goeth . . ., but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man will be betrayed. It were better for him if that man had not been born."

### **"Is It I, Lord?"**

It is a warning for Judas from the merciful Christ. But by this time sin has eaten its way deep into the soul of the wretched man, and he refuses to yield. Christ he has tried in the balance and found wanting. He prefers his bag of silver and the good graces of the men with power. Very soon he will be finished for ever with this company of dreamers, but even with them he must be tactful and diplomatic to the end. He will face Christ and brazen out His ominous warning. What does he care? And so, when deep concern lines the faces of these true lovers of Christ, the traitor, too, feigns alarm. Christ, it seems, knows the secret of Judas' heart. What of that, then? And, with an insolence that is incredible, he looks up into the eyes of the Master. "A traitor, Lord? It is not I, is it?" And he points his index finger towards his breast. A mighty grace has been offered and rejected, and the Heart of Christ is crushed with sorrow and pain. He will not force this wayward man; He never does. Judas will have his way. Christ, having tried in vain to save Judas from his sin, makes sure now to shield at least his reputation with the others. "Judas, what thou dost, do quickly." The eleven were accustomed to orders like this being given to Judas, for he carried the purse and was the trusted apostle. Frequently the Master would have some special commission for Judas to execute. Accordingly, they thought no more about him when he left the supper room and went out into the darkness, bent, they believed, on some errand of mercy undertaken at the bidding of Jesus. The traitor's good name with the others is still intact. That much at least Christ's love has made sure, even if He has failed to save him from his sin.

### **It Was Night.**

"Judas, therefore . . . went out. And it was night." Darkness fell down upon the soul of the apostle, and he hastened recklessly to destruction. We find him next with a cohort of soldiers drawing near the garden of Gethsemane. With nervous tread he walks along, a little ahead of the rest. There is an undefined fear clutching at his heart—the warning note of conscience—which all his self-assurances and specious reasonings have not succeeded in reducing to silence. How can he draw back now, even if he wanted to? Poor Judas! But even yet, even now, on the very edge of the precipice, will that Christ he has rejected make a final effort to arouse his sorrow and win back his love once more? Christ has been kneeling in prayer under the olive trees, but on the approach of the soldiers and their leader He rises from His knees and goes forward to meet them. By now the traitor has become quite callous. Conscience is a delicate instrument, easily blunted. Let the Christ save Himself if He will and as best He may. Judas has made his bargain and he is going to stand by it. "Judas, therefore, gave them a sign, saying: 'Whomsoever I shall kiss, the same is He. Hold Him fast. Lead Him away carefully: 'And he brushes aside the branches of the trees with both hands and emerges into the moonlight. Yes, there is the Man standing erect before him, the Man Who loved Judas, and loves Judas still, but to Judas the Man is a disappointment. "And he kissed Him." Is there any hope left for Judas? For, if there is still even a shadow of a chance of saving him, this loving Christ will seize upon it. Will not Judas pause and think?

From his place there in the embrace of Judas Jesus looks steadily into the traitor's eyes. Such a look does He give him as will afterwards break the heart of Peter. Peter's sin was a sin of weakness. Judas was more calculating. He had sat down and reckoned up the profits and losses, and had calmly and deliberately decided that the contract was worth while. Once more Christ will plead and warn, but He will not compel. Love must be won, not forced. "Friend, whereunto art thou come? Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" "And he kissed Him." Again Jesus has verified in Himself that definition of a Friend—a Man Who knows all about another and loves him just the same. As He looks straight into the traitor's heart, every single incident, from the first dallying with the temptation to this terrifying consummation, is spread out before His eyes like the pages of an open book. And, even in the face of all this treachery and

ingratitude. Christ loves Judas still; Christ pleads with Judas to think and repent even still, but Judas will not be won. “And he kissed Him.”

### **Sweet Sin.**

There is a sweetness about sin, as there is a sweetness about poison. That sweetness Judas had tasted. He had handled his money. He had ingratiated himself, parasite-like, into the favour of the men with power and influence. No doubt about it, they would remember it for him that they owed Christ's arrest to his co-operation and plans. He had felt the importance of his position at the head of a troop of soldiers who awaited his orders. That was all, that much made up the sweetness of sin for Judas Iscariot. What a miserable pittance for which to betray Christ! The bewitching of trifles! But the worst was not yet. Who tastes the sweetness of poison must surely pay a bitter penalty, and who takes sin into his heart holds an asp close to his breast. This, too, Judas discovered. No sooner is his crime completed and he has stowed the unresisting Christ into the hands of His enemies, than Judas is torn with remorse. Back he rushes to the Chief Priests with the coins in his hands. “I have sinned,” he cries, in a voice hoarse with despair. “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood!” They smile upon him condescendingly. He has done his work very well. The bargain had been made and kept. They had paid the price settled upon, and Judas had secured their Victim. Indeed, he has been a useful tool in their hands, but now he is of use no longer. “Innocent blood! Why, Judas, that is your own affair. Look you to it then.” Why did he not foresee all this misery? Why did he not heed Christ's warnings, repeated so lovingly and so insistently? He had dreamed of wealth, but now he has flung away even the thirty pieces of silver, for they were burning like coals of fire in his hands. He had fondly imagined that the betrayal would open the way to power, but these great men have just turned sneeringly from him. He is stunned at last into realising that sin is a huge deception. A hatred seizes upon him, hatred for all men and hatred for himself. He must get away, anywhere, provided he be left alone. And as he rushes out, he knows not where and cares not, a vision rises up once more before his tortured brain—the Face of Jesus of Nazareth: Jesus, Who had said He was ready to forgive the repentant sinner not once merely, not seven times merely, but till seventy times seven times. Jesus, Who had poured words of merciful forgiveness into the ear of Mary Magdalene, and had made her the inseparable companion of His Immaculate Mother. Jesus, Who had lifted up the woman taken in adultery and saved her from her enemies. Jesus, Who had sat with publicans and sinners, Who had been accused of being their Friend, and had admitted the truth of the accusation. Jesus, Who had looked so compassionately at Judas himself tonight and had spoken His warnings with so much gentleness and tact—the Face of that Jesus haunts his brain now, but still Judas resists. “My sin is greater than that I should hope for pardon.”

### **Despair.**

Blindly he hastens away to the lonely valley of Hinnon, trying to shut out the vision of that merciful Christ from his mind. The blackness of despair envelops him and blocks out every ray of hope. To the end Christ is a disappointment to Judas. To the end he refuses to believe in Christ's mercy. To the end he cannot be convinced that Christ could know everything about him and love him just the same. “My sin is greater than that I should hope for pardon. My case is exceptional!” Despair ties the hands of an omnipotent Lover. With his worldly ambitions dashed to the ground, and with a sin which he persuades himself is too great to be pardoned, what is there left to live for? Better finish once and for all with this life of disappointments! Jesus will hang on the cross tomorrow and pray for His murderers. Judas will hang from the tree tonight and refuse to believe in His love and His readiness to forgive.

So ended the story of Judas Iscariot. Mistakes crowd into every chapter, but the fatal mistake, the mistake that was quite irremediable, was not Judas' love of money or even the horrible act of betrayal. The saddest mistake of all was Judas' refusal to believe that Christ could be such a Friend, that He could still love Judas, and still want Judas, in spite of all. One remedy could have saved Judas, as it saved Peter; one only remedy there was, but it was an infallible one. A humble confession of his sin and a cry for mercy would instantly have restored all the old loving relations between Christ and the traitor. But that cry and that confession never rose from the lips of Judas. He refused to believe that Christ could

be such a Friend. To Judas, Christ was a disappointment, and, to the infinitely forgiving, infinitely loving Jesus of Nazareth, Judas Iscariot was a disappointment, too.

-----  
There's a wideness in God's mercy  
Like the wideness of the sea;  
There's a kindness in His justice  
Which is more than clemency.

There is no place where earth's sorrows  
Are more felt than up in Heaven:  
There's no place where earth's failings  
Have such kind judgment given.

For the love of God is broader  
Than the measures of man's mind,  
And the Heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.

But we make His love too narrow  
By false limits of our own,  
And we magnify His strictness  
With a zeal He will not own.

If our love were but more simple,  
We should take Him at His word;  
And our lives would be all sunshine  
In the sweetness of Our Lord.  
—Father Faber.

Nihil Obstat:  
F. Moynihan,  
Censor Theol. Deputatus.

Imprimatur:  
✠ D. Mannix,  
Archiepiscopus Melbournensis.

\*\*\*\*\*