

On the PASSION *of* OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

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Homily Thirty-Three

Jesus before His enemies, who are ready to seize Him.

Matt. 26:47–50; Mark 14:43–45; Luke 22:47–48; John 18:3–9.

THE ENEMIES of Jesus had long been ready to seize the hated Nazarene Teacher. There had been sufficient time to consider a plan for the deed in all its parts. It hardly needs to be said that only offended pride and vainglory, black envy, and other wild passions were the reasons that the Sanhedrin and, at its head, the high priest Caiaphas had risen up against the Lord Jesus. So many respected men, so many learned men, so many men experienced in leadership, as were the members of the Sanhedrin—how did they conduct their attempt against Jesus; how did they apprehend Him? Oh, how great our Savior appeared, even in this situation, and how pitifully base the members of the Sanhedrin appeared, due to their base passions!

And while He yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with

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him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people (Matt. 26:47).

The Lord had said, *Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me* (Matt. 26:46). And it turned out to be precisely so—His forevision was sure, far surer than the vision of the Sanhedrin.

The traitor, who knew well where his Master and Friend would be, and when He would be there (cf. John 18:1–2), could doubtlessly have betrayed Him at any time, without an uproar, using two or three people. But how did Jesus' enemies act? They took the strongest measures and sent a whole crowd of armed men with Judas just to seize, in an undefended place, Him Who was so meek that He would not quench smoking flax (cf. Is. 42:3; Matt. 12:20). Judas had been given a band (John 18:3)—a detachment of five hundred Roman soldiers—and a detachment from the Sanhedrin, from all three classes: the priestly, the scholarly, and the elders of the people (cf. Mark 14:43). With the band was a tribune, a leader of a thousand men; with the servants of the Sanhedrin were a *captain and officers* (cf. John 18:12). The Roman guard was armed with swords, and the servants of the Sanhedrin with staves. Even this was not enough for the honor of the Sanhedrin. It was necessary for the *captains of the temple*—the leaders of the temple guards—and even the *chief priests* to be there (cf. Luke 22:52). Let us add that they did not resolve upon this dishonorable deed in the day, but at night. And despite the fact that there was a full moon, and consequently it was a bright night, they carried lanterns and torches, as though they had to catch Him in a cave (cf. John 18:3). What was all this for? If it was to show the people that they were dealing with someone who subverted the peace of the temple and of society, then who would have seen what these pathetic people were doing in the middle of the night? Is it not obvious that this was fear—due to faintheartedness, confusion of mind, and dishonor—and that they were trembling for their safety when no one was pursuing them?

He that betrayed Him ... came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master; and kissed Him (Matt. 26:48–49).

THE ORTHODOX WORD

In general, an ordinary kiss is a sign of friendship and love. Thus has it been for everyone in every era (cf. Gen. 29:11, 13; 33:4; Acts 20:37; Rom. 16:16). Judas and the Sanhedrin thought that Jesus Christ would hide Himself, as He had hidden Himself more than once (cf. Luke 4:30; John 8:59), if they did not take measures to seize Him unexpectedly. The poor, blind men did not believe in His divine might. In addition, they supposed that the guards would not recognize Jesus in the circle of His disciples at night. And so, an ordinary sign of friendship was taken as a prearranged sign by which Judas would betray his Master to His enemies.

The Lord did not avert His face from Judas, and accepted the kiss of the traitor. Oh, how disgraceful that kiss was! Whereas David had meekly borne the curse of Shimei (cf. II Kings 16:5), whose benefactor he had been, here evil was acting openly. What righteous one among men would not have uttered a bitter word upon hearing Judas' greeting? What holy man could have calmly accepted the kiss of a betrayer? But Thou, O Heavenly Meekness, didst calmly, and even with sorrowful love, say to the betrayer: *Friend, wherefore art thou come?* (Matt. 26:50). *Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?* (Luke 22:48). How powerfully does this Heavenly Meekness say to us: *Learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart* (Matt. 11:29). This is how one must bear offences inflicted by people dear to our soul, by our friends, by our relatives, by people for whom we have done much good! Calling His unfortunate disciple His friend, the Lord showed him that Divine Love was ready to receive him even then. Expressing astonishment rather than indignation at Judas' appearance among His enemies and at his kiss of betrayal, Christ displayed the sorrow of love for His unfortunate disciple—sorrow that Judas had so painfully offended his own conscience. With a breath of love He desired to soften and heal the wound of his soul. Behold a love which, not thinking of its own danger, is concerned for the state of its enemy!

Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? (John 18:4).

Jesus Christ knew why the armed crowd had come and where

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things were heading.¹ However, having responded to the traitor, He went up to the crowd and asked, *Whom seek ye?* A marvellous thing! When they had wanted to proclaim Him king, He hid Himself. Now He knew that they had come for His life, and He Himself went out to His enemies. He well knew Whom they wanted. But by His question He was forcing their consciences to look upon the dishonorable nature of their deed, and by their response He was protecting His disciples from them. *Whom seek ye?* Against whom have these armed men come? What are so many people preparing for? Can all this be aimed against Him Who did nothing but good to anyone? Can it be aimed against Him Who is so meek and unprotected?

They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth (John 18:5).

It is more than likely that among those who had come, besides Judas, there were people who personally knew Jesus. But the Lord's free and unexpected appearance before His enemies, and His simple and meek, but to an even greater extent surprising, question threw them all into confusion. And they were barely able to utter the reply—"We seek Jesus of Nazareth" (cf. John 1:45-46; 7:41-42)—which, due to their lack of faith, had so long tormented them about the unprecedented Envoy of Heaven.

I am He, said Jesus. And this was like a thunderbolt to His enemies. *They went backward*, which happens when one is at war with one's enemy who, being thrown into confusion, fearfully seeks to save himself by fleeing. Moreover, they *fell to the ground*, so terrified had they become. Whether it was the Person of the unparalleled Righteous One, so great even in the eyes of His enemies, that struck the impure consciences of those who had come to commit the crime, or whether it was the special, wondrous might of Christ acting there, the Evangelist does not tell us. But it is obvious that the greatness of Christ Jesus was revealed before the face of His enemies in a brilliant light; it is clear to each and all that in the presence of His will the designs of His enemies were but as a spider's web.

¹ Cf. Blessed Augustine, *The Harmony of the Gospels* 3:3.

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Then asked He them again, Whom seek ye? (John 18:7).

When the poor crowd had come to itself somewhat, the Lord asked, *Whom seek ye?*—and when they had repeated their previous reply, He said, *I have told you that I am He.* This meant, “I repeat that it was a sin to seek Me the way a dangerous man is sought. I am not what your passions want to portray Me as.”

If therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way (John 18:8).

“After having shown to them all things which should have been sufficient to repulse them, when they persevered in their wickedness, and had no excuse,”² He turned to the care of His disciples and said, *If therefore ye seek Me, leave them;* that is, pointing to His disciples, He said, *Let these go their way.* We shall see that the first question that Jesus’ judges will put before Him will be the question about His disciples and His doctrine (cf. John 18:19). An unknown youth, who was following Christ when the soldiers were leading Him away, was barely able, by casting off his garment, to save himself from the soldiers who had laid hold of him (cf. Mark 14:51–52). All of this undoubtedly assures us that those who had been sent with Judas had been given an order by the Sanhedrin to seize not only Jesus, but His disciples as well. The Lord, protecting His sincere disciples, uttered not a request but a powerful command—“Leave them”—and the servants involuntarily fulfilled His word. He gave Himself over into the hands of His enemies, but took care for the safety of His disciples. They were not yet capable of bearing the sufferings for His name that they would so eagerly endure later. If the question of a weak woman was to arouse such fear in Peter that he would deny the Master, what could the inveterate malice of Jesus’ enemies have driven the weak disciples to? They could have laid many sins upon their own souls and estranged themselves from the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. The Heavenly Master did not permit them to come to this.

That the saying might be fulfilled, which He spake, Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost none (John 18:9).

² St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, Homily 83.

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The Lord, having protected His disciples from His enemies, not only saved their lives, but preserved their unsteady souls from terrible trials. For this reason the Evangelist recalls the Lord's words which He had spoken in the prayer to His Father after the Passover Supper (cf. John 17:12).

Praise and glory to Thee, O our Savior, wondrous in Thy greatness and love! Only where Thou art, and Thy holy will, is there light and greatness and sense and sanctity. When we are disposed toward sin and not toward Thy will, our affairs are found to be filled with confusion of thoughts, dullness of mind, and disorder of the senses—first fear, then audacity, then cowardice, then daring pride—opposing one another at every step. Such are the works of sin. Pride thinks much of itself; it presents its works before itself and others as intelligent and great, but it does not recognize the disorders of sin, and by this it appears even more pitiful. Amen.



(To be continued.)