

My Way

Perhaps the most popular of all of Frank Sinatra's songs is My Way!

For the under thirty crowd, Frank Sinatra was probably the best known singer of his time, and he liked to cozy up to mobsters and presidents... back in the day when the two could be distinguished...

And My Way was all about just that — how he makes it to the top using his best thinking, his best calculations, the raw strength of his willpower.

No wonder that song sold a kazillion copies, because it speaks to something that is deeply and fundamentally human.

And speaking of that which is deeply and fundamentally human, what we have today is Judas.

You know, that one fellow who gets almost zero air time during sermons, Judas.

Judas has his cameo on Palm Sunday, during the reading of the Passion, but frankly, there's so much going on that day, who has time to talk about him?

But here he is again today.

Oh, he's already dead, but our reading from Acts deals with the consequences of what Judas did, leaving that gap in the needed twelve apostles, a gap that is filled today.

So maybe today is a good day to spend some time with Judas.

Not that he's a pleasant subject, which is why I usually steer clear of him.

But I'm thinking there's got to be more to Judas than first meets the eye.

I mean, the first impression most folks have of Judas is that he's a spineless sellout who gives up his best friend for a Visa gift card, or in Biblical terms, for thirty pieces of silver.

Why spend time talking about a greedy traitor?

But I have a feeling our first impression may miss the mark; and if we dig a little deeper, we might find in Judas something quite disturbing, something even unnerving, NOT so much because of who he is, but because of how he might remind us of who WE are.....

Judas Iscariot is the full name.

Iscariot being a name for the daggers the Jewish revolutionaries used against the Romans in the guerrilla war that is picking up steam during Jesus' ministry.

But what if Judas isn't motivated by greed or cowardice, but rather by something that tends to afflict me on a regular basis, and maybe it afflicts some of you too, from time to time?

That something is doing things "My Way."

You see, rather than being a spineless coward, what if Judas is thinking that if Jesus is arrested, and facing execution, well, maybe that will force God's hand?

Just like some of our fringe group Christian friends who are secretly hoping for nuclear war in the Middle East, so that God will be forced to intervene; and I quote:

"End-time prophecy focuses on dramatic events in the Middle East, but can you recognize the signs leading to the return of Jesus Christ?"

[V]ery few realize that Bible prophecy explains in advance the earthshaking events that will lead to increased conflict and greater disasters in the region—ultimately to World War III and **then the return of Christ!**” Tomorrow’s World 2018.

So what if Judas helps set up Jesus — believing with all his heart that God will then have no choice but to step in and make all things right?

That’s “My Way” thinking!

After all, if your child or mine is in danger from some thugs, won’t we do everything in our power to save our child?

Of course we will!

So maybe Judas is thinking that when it comes to God’s son, God the Father can be no different!

Does he betray Jesus **not** because he’s a traitor, but because he cannot open his mind wide enough to see that God’s Way is so different than My Way?

And that becomes the central problem for Judas, and it is the central problem for me, and maybe for some of you too.

We mix up “My Way” with “God’s Way,” imposing our best thinking on God, only to find ourselves ending up with egg on our face or just looking stupid, and sometimes perhaps, like Judas, with blood on our hands.

The remedy for this great temptation to substitute “My Way” for “God’s Way” is given to us in today’s gospel lesson.

I have to say, I was sorely tempted to ask our deacon to sing this gospel lesson to you today.

Because today's gospel really does need to be sung in order to be understood, and perhaps, after the mass, you can look at it again, and sing it to yourself.

Why?

Because this intimate prayer of Jesus, if it's just spoken, is very hard to follow.

Words loop around, the sentences are long and meandering, the effort to read it straight through can very well leave you shaking your head in confusion, if you're able to pay attention at all.

But sung slowly, the profound depth of this heartfelt communion between Jesus and the Father comes through — for what we are witnessing is not logic or connecting the dots — we are eavesdropping on something that maybe reminds you of your first kiss; something that feels like that hour you spent long ago with your very best friend, sharing the deepest intimacies of your soul, and hearing the deepest intimacies of her soul.....

What Jesus invites us into, what Judas could not bring himself to do, is letting go of our will, letting go of our best thinking, and in the letting go, allowing ourselves to be consumed by the will of God.

Which doesn't mean looking for a quick exit from the realities of this life — it doesn't mean being transported into some pie in the sky in the sweet by and by.

When Jesus looks into heaven at the beginning of this gospel, he's not looking into the faraway places: but rather seeing you in your everyday circumstances, with your everyday problems, through heaven's eyes.

He sees the immense beauty of creation as it is held together every moment of every day by the will, the breath, the delight of God.

A God who invites us to let our will, our desires, our hopes and dreams, come into alignment with God's.

And to learn that, we need each other.

Judas goes off on his crazy scheme all by himself — and we know how that turns out.

While the other disciples aren't much more insightful or faithful than Judas; at least they hang together, and in the hanging together, find themselves in places of such overwhelming grace, such cavernous hope, that they become, as we are invited to become, earthen vessels and wounded healers, in which the living, breathing, death-defying Holy Spirit comes and finds a home — and gives us our life.

This pouring out of grace really does change everything we thought we knew about God — and ourselves.

I saw a movie last week about a Pentecostal minister who for 20 years spoke of fire and brimstone for those not "saved," until one day he had a revelation that it's not up to us to save ourselves or others, but that God, in Jesus, has already given us, ("us" being the whole human race and all of creation), that gift of salvation, and gives it freely, graciously, indiscriminately.

That pastor got fired from his church because people need to believe there are always winners and losers.

And we love to claim for ourselves a place in the winner's circle.

But in Christ, God says to all of us losers: "You're now all winners - not because **you** are good, but because **God** is good."

Judas lost his way and got caught up with a vision of how the kingdom of God might come to earth, not in weakness and vulnerability, but through the sword.

But in Jesus, we learn that God's kingdom is already here, in the shining eyes of children, in daily service to one another, in the kindness of strangers.

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