***“One Of You Will Betray Me.” “Is it I Lord?”***

In the course of our lives, being betrayed is probably an inevitability. Many times, it is due to ego. Some personality types simply need to be right all of the time, or need to be in charge all of the time, or need to feel important all of the time. A sad reality of life is that we can’t always be right, we can’t always be in charge and we can’t always receive the affirmation that we want. Sadly, that means that all too often the one or ones who stand in the way become the enemy.

 Among the Twelve Apostles we saw examples of what I have just written: Needing to be right, needing to be in charge, needing to be a part of the inner circle. The mother of James and John tried to get a prominent seat for her sons. There was jealousy over Peter, James, and John being called to special events, and Saint Peter trying to set up booths on the Mount of the Transfiguration contrary to what Jesus wanted. St. Peter was told just days before the Transfiguration event that he was the “Rock,” and so when he asserted himself at the Transfiguration, doing what he thought he was supposed to do, he was greatly mistaken and was chastised by Jesus. He failed to ask Jesus first. Obviously, infighting and misunderstandings were a real part of the Apostolic College; and why wouldn’t that be the case? Who did Satan attempt to enter? He attempted to enter every one of the Apostles by instilling pride and egocentric needs, and he often did so by whispering words to produce jealousy. The Bible tells us that Satan entered Judas, and Jesus at the Transfiguration rebukes Peter by saying, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” Jesus heard the words of Satan in what Peter had to say. In short what we see in the Apostles is a hot bed of spiritual warfare. St. Paul had to address the matter of spiritual warfare in the most appropriate way - by putting on the whole Armor of God. (See Ephesians 6:14-17.)

 Fighting the Devil by using secular means does not work. The Bible makes a clear distinction between worldly warfare and spiritual warfare, and even the most devout people can be subject to the wiles of the enemy. Without saying more, I simply wish to say that I have been a Confessor to an Order of Nuns and to an Order of Monks. In the holy confines of their enclosure there was peace and yet there was spiritual warfare, often including jealousy and resentments. No matter where we are Satan wishes to infect us and cause disunity. And the closer we walk with Jesus, more doubt, anger, frustration and fear appear. We are a bit like St. Peter walking on water. He participated in a miracle, and the moment he began to doubt, he began to sink. Part of his problem was that he suddenly believed that he was on his own, rather than being sustained by Jesus. He began to sink, because the moment he took his eyes off Jesus, he was suddenly painfully on his own.

 However, a shift took place in the Apostolic College. Some of them became convinced of their own self-importance, and even resented it when they heard that people other than the twelve of them were engaged in miraculous matters. They began to think of themselves in an exclusive manner. Some of them enjoyed being the “gate keepers” for Jesus as people came running to them to gain access, “Sir we wish to see Jesus.” Some of them began to think of themselves as Jesus’ protectors, “God forbid,” is what they uttered when Jesus told them what would lie ahead. They went on to say that they would never allow that to happen to Jesus. Then the time came. The Triumphant Entry of “Palm Sunday” and then, Thursday brought all of the issues of their own hearts together: their fears, their doubts, their egos and the proverbial questions: “What’s in it for me” and “But what about me?” How could it be that when Jesus looked at them and told them that one of them would betray Him that the response could be, “Is it I, Lord” unless they recognized the potential of betrayal in their very own hearts. Judas was THE one. But what was in the hearts of the others that could not allow them to say, “That’s impossible!.” Why is it so often that we take our eyes off the Visions of God and then set our own goals and fight anyone who blocks us? Do we sometimes, when we take our eyes off Jesus then establish our own goals, even if they are not necessarily goals established by Jesus? But because our goals appear to be good goals, do they “feel” like they’re right? I like to call this “Debbie Boone theology,” from the song “You Light up my Life” - “It can’t be wrong if it FEELS so right.” Why must feelings be elevated above the call of Jesus to keep our eyes on Him? It would appear that the Apostles had even developed their own stories, their own plans, and their own outcomes, based on the encounters we read about in the Bible. They were establishing their own realities at times, instead of acting on HIS. They created their own realities of what would lie ahead with Jesus, and therefore, they were “caught” when Jesus told them that one of them would betray Him. They knew that He could look directly into their hearts. He had proven that, and now they knew that He knew... their innermost “feelings.” When we judge, when we condemn, when we create our own realities, they are all too often a result of feelings and our egocentric needs. The culture even applauds these efforts as truth: “I always trust my gut.” What if one’s gut has misinformation? When Simon Peter lied when he was asked if he were one of the Apostles, was it to save his skin? Was his response a prayerful response, or had Satan entered Simon Peter also. Wasn’t his denial a type of betrayal?

Take some time out today and ask yourself a few questions:

* Have I ever betrayed someone else on the basis my feelings by having created my own reality?
* Have I ever taken my eyes off Jesus and suddenly had Satan enter me?
* Have I ever become so discouraged that I have said “I quit” without asking God if that was His command?
* Have I taken the methods that I have used in conflict in my life and used those methods in the church or in my family?
* Is conflict with other people a significant part of my history?
* Have I ever been so angry with someone that I decided to play God and judge them with my standards?
* Have I ever elevated my ideas and plans and thoughts to a level where at the end of my judgments I parenthetically add “The Word of the Lord” expecting everyone to say “Thanks be to God.”
* Have I taken the path of least resistance in conflict and like the Apostles simply fled hoping that it would all work out alright?
* Have I allowed myself to be drawn into someone’s feelings and assumed that their feelings were necessarily true?

All of these questions relate to “Apostle behaviors” that we see in the New Testament, and therefore, led to the Apostles responding to Jesus when He announced betrayal, “Is it I, Lord.” You can see that each one of us has the potential to betray, and each one of us can also be forgiven IF WE ASK. “If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” When Jesus visited the Apostles after His Resurrection while they were fishing, the same man who denied knowing Jesus three times, was asked by Jesus if he loved Jesus - three times. Did Jesus forgive Peter, and if so, why? Wasn’t Peter WRONG and INAPPROPRIATE? Forgiveness involves compassion, and Jesus loved Peter having even made him the “CEO” of the Apostolic College. When St. Peter acted like an average misguided human being, was that the measure of his ministry?

 The Beatitudes are correctives for our sinful egocentric behavior (Matthew 5: 2-12.)

“Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in Heaven, for so man persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

 When we are betrayed, we always need to remember that Jesus stands with us understanding more than we can imagine. He was not crucified on the basis of truth. Apart from fulfilling Scripture, He was betrayed by even some of those whom He trusted, and the charges were based on misinformation, fear, jealousy and others who resented Him being in charge. Today as every day, we ask Jesus to be in charge of our lives. Satan cannot tolerate forgiveness. He can, however, use unforgiveness to his advantage.