

Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



South Aisle Window (near to the Chapel)

Saturday in the Fifth Week of Lent

Reading: John 13: 12-27

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfil the scripture, “The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.” I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.’

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, ‘Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.’ The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. **One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him;** Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, ‘Lord, who is it?’ Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.’ So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, ‘Do quickly what you are going to do.

Commentary

At the end of the Gospel of St John, Peter turns and sees ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, ‘Lord who is it that is going to betray you?’ And the Gospel concludes, ‘This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.’ However, there is no consensus among modern scholars who the ‘beloved disciple’ is, but the idea that he had been at the Last Supper has suggested that he must have been an apostle, and many have thought John.

The phrase ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved,’ is used 6 times in the Gospel of John, once at the Crucifixion: “Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, here is your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.”

According to tradition, St John took Our Lady to live with him in Ephesus (in modern day Turkey) where he was exiled to the island of Patmos. St Irenaeus in the 2nd century tells us he heard Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna preach, who had been taught and appointed by John the Apostle. He testifies that John the son of Zebedee was the ‘beloved disciple’ and lived to a great age in Ephesus where he wrote his Gospel and where he eventually died and was buried.

In Christian Art, John is either depicted as an old patriarch, with a white beard and a scroll or an eagle, or as beardless youth. He is represented as

the latter in this window and several other windows in the church (where he is shown to be the first to arrive at the Tomb of Christ), as well as the sculpted figure beneath the foot of the great Rood over the Chancel.

The apocryphal 'Acts of John,' a collection of stories of the apostle that began circulating from the 2nd century, contributed much to his iconography, including the idea that he became an apostle of Christ at a young age. Also, it tells the story of John being given a poisoned chalice to drink by the high priest of the Temple of Diana in Ephesus, to test his faith. Through the power of God, the poison left the chalice in the form of a snake. John then drank it and was unharmed. Thus, John is often represented with a chalice, sometimes with the snake departing from it.

Of course, the chalice (which is marked with a crucifix) can also refer to the Last Supper, when he reclined on the breast of Jesus. As well as to the words of Christ to John and James after their mother had petitioned Him that her sons should sit at His right and left in His Kingdom. Jesus asks them: 'Are you able to drink the cup that I am drink?' They affirm that they can before Jesus says, 'My chalice indeed you shall drink.'

Meditation

What is that chalice that John and James are asked to share?

They are to learn what it means to follow Christ to the Cross and into Resurrection life. Christ did not seek to be identified with the mighty and powerful, but with the powerless and the suffering. He cries with

those who cry out loud with tears and suffers with those who are suffering. Saint James and Saint John are reminded of the commitment that discipleship demands ... to weep with those who weep, to serve those on the margins, to suffer with the suffering.

For there is another poison that can damage the Church today – we can fail to cry out those who are suffering, we can fail to serve those who need to be served ... and we can fail to love.

Spend time praying for those individuals, groups and peoples who are suffering today, the prejudiced against, the unjustly treated, the marginalised and all living in violent situations.

Prayer

Eternal Word, only begotten Son of God,

Teach me true generosity.

Teach me to serve you as you deserve.

To give without counting the cost,

To fight heedless of wounds,

To labour without seeking rest,

To sacrifice myself without thought of any reward

Save the knowledge that I have done your will.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen