

(Part 4)

'While Jesus was thus still talking, came lo! Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, and with him a main multitude with swords and glaives ' sent from the high priests, the scribes, and the ancients of the people.'

Albeit nothing can be more effectual to man's soul's health and to increase all kind of virtue in every Christian heart than devoutly to remember the whole process of Christ's bitter passion, yet shall he take a further benefit thereby, which maketh or conceiveth that that is here mentioned of the sleeping of the apostles, while the Son of Man was in betraying, to be as it were a resemblance and figure of the state of the world that followed. For Christ, to redeem mankind, became verily the Son of Man, as he that came, though conceived without the seed of man, yet by propagation of our first parents, and so was the very son of Adam, and that for this intent by his passion to restore Adam's offspring (being through their forefather's default lost, and miserably cast away) into more wealth and felicity than ever they had before.

Whereupon, for all he was God, called he himself still the Son of Man, because he was very man indeed, and so by the rehearsal of his manhood, which alonely ' was subject to death, did he evermore put us in remembrance of the benefit of his passion. And without fail God it was that died, while he died that was God. Yet did not his godhead die, but his manhood only, and not all that neither, but his body alone, if we will rather weigh the thing as it is, than as we are wont commonly to term it. For we say a man is dead, when the soul leaveth the body dead, and so departeth from it, and yet dieth not at all.

But forasmuch as it liked him, not only to be called a man, but also for our salvation to take upon him man's nature too, and finally to incorporate us all in one body with himself, these I mean whom he hath by his whole-some sacraments and faith regenerated and renewed, and therewithal vouchsafed to make us partakers of such names as himself is customably called by, for scripture nameth all faithful Christian folk both gods and christs, I cannot think we should do much amiss, if we stood always in fear the time to be almost come that Christ the Son of Man shall be delivered unto sinners, as oft as we see any likelihood that Christ's mystical body, the Church of Christ I say, that is to wit, good Christian people, shall like thralls be cast into sinful wretches' hands. Which thing we have seen mishap (alas, the more pity) in one place or other these many hundred years, while divers parts of Christendom, some by the cruel Turks are assaulted, and some by sundry sects of heretics through inward division despiteously ' mangled and torn.

And therefore whensoever we either see or hear any such danger (be it never so far from us) anywhere to misfortune, let us then remember that it is not meet for us to sit still and sleep, but forthwith to arise, and as we may, if we cannot otherwise yet at the least wise with our prayers, to help other in their need. And we ought to care never the less for the matter because it is far from us. For if this sentence of the paynim poet ' in his comedy be marvellously commended, which saith: 'I am a man myself, and therefore whatsoever happeneth to any other man, mine own part reckon I to be therein,' how much is it to be misliked in any Christian man to sleep, and little pass ' what danger his even ' Christian be in.

And to declare this Christ commanded not only those whom he had placed nearest unto him, but as well the rest whom he had caused to tarry somewhat further off, in like manner to watch and pray.

And if perchance we pass ^{clx} not, what harm other folk feel, because they be far from us, let us yet at the least regard the peril that may fortune to fall to ourselves, since we ought of reason to fear lest their undoing may be an entry and a beginning of ours, seeing we are by daily experience taught with what force the fire runneth forth when it is once enkindled, and when the plague or pestilence reigneth, what cause there is to dread infection.

Then seeing all man's help can little avail us without God preserve us from harm, let us never be unmindful what the gospel speaketh here, but ever think that Christ himself doth again earnestly say unto us, as he did then: 'Why sleep you? Arise and pray that you enter not into temptation.'

But now here cometh to my remembrance another point besides, which is, that Christ is then delivered into the hands of sinners, whensoever his blessed body in the holy sacrament is consecrated and handled of beastly, vicious, and most abominable priests. As often as we see any such case fall (and fall doth it, alas, too oft a great deal) let us reckon that Christ himself then speaketh these words unto us afresh: 'Why sleep you? Watch, arise, and pray, that you enter not into temptation. For the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.'

For doubtless by the lewd ' examples of naughty priests doth vice and evil living lightly increase and creep in among the people. And the unmeeter they be (whose office it is to watch and pray for the people, to obtain God's gracious help for them) the more need perdy * the people hath to watch, rise, and heartily pray for themselves, and yet not for themselves only, but for such priests also, since greatly were it for the behoof of the laity, that evil priests were amended.

Finally more specially is Christ delivered into sinners' hands among those sects of heretics, which although they do receive this blessed sacrament of the altar oftener than other do, and on this would bear the world in hand, that most of all other they have the same in reverence, yet because without any necessity, to the great dishonour of the Catholic Church, contrary to the common custom they receive it under both kinds, do nevertheless after the receiving thereof, under the colour of honouring it, shamefully blaspheme it, while some of them name it still bread and wine, and some, which is worst of all, not only bread and wine, but furthermore count it nought else but bare bread and wine alone, utterly denying the very body of Christ (albeit they call it by that name) to be contained in the said sacrament.

Which point since they go about to maintain, contrary to the most evident words of scripture, contrary to the most plain interpretations of all the old holy fathers, contrary to the belief that the whole Catholic Church so many hundreds years hath most steadfastly holden, and contrary to the truth by so many thousand miracles sufficiently approved, these that are in this latter kind of heresy, which is indeed the worse of the twain, be they not, trow you, even as evil as they that this night laid hands upon Christ, and as those soldiers of Pilate too that in scorn making low curtsy to Christ as it had been to honour him, most spitefully dishonoured him, calling him in mockage king of the Jews? Like as these men kneeling and crouching do call the blessed

sacrament of the altar the body of Christ, which themselves confess, for all that, they do no more believe than Pilate's soldiers believed that Christ was a king.

As oft therefore as we hear any like inconvenience arise in any other nation, how far soever it be from us, let us by and by make our reckoning, that Christ still saith unto us: 'Why sleep ye? Arise and pray that ye fall not into temptation.' For at this point wheresoever this venomous plague reigneth most, it infecteth not all the people at once in one day, but in process of time by little and little increasing more and more, while such persons as at the first beginning can abide no heresy, afterward being content to hear of it, begin less and less to dislike it, and within a while after can endure to give ear to large lewd ' talk therein, and at length are quite carried away themselves therewith. This disease still creeping, as saith the apostle, forth further like a canker " doth in conclusion overrun the whole country altogether.

Let us then watch, rise and incessantly pray, both that all they may soon repent and amend, that are thus wretchedly led into this folly by the craft of the devil, and that God never suffer us to fall into the like temptation, nor the devil ever to raise any such of his tempestuous storms in the coasts where we dwell.

But since we have gone so long out of a matter upon these mysteries, let us now return again to the history of Christ's passion.

'Then Judas when he had received of the bishops a band of soldiers, and servants of the Pharisees , came thither with lanterns and torches . And while Jesus was yet speaking cometh, lo! Judas Iscariot one of the twelve, and with him a main multitude with swords and glaives, sent by the high priests, the scribes, and the ancients of the people. And the traitor had given them a token.'

This band of soldiers which, as the evangelists do mention, the bishops delivered unto the traitor, was as I suppose a sort of the Roman soldiers that Pilate licensed the bishops to take, among which company had the Pharisees, the scribes, and the ancients of the people, set their own servants, either for that they trusted not well the president Pilate's men, or else to help them with a greater number, in case perhaps upon some sudden uproar in the night Christ might by force be conveyed from them, or finally for that all his apostles (which was the thing that they perchance coveted beside) might be there so taken all at once, that none of them in the dark should in any wise escape their hands. Which their purpose that they could not bring about, was wrought by his mighty power, who was therefore taken himself alone, because it was his pleasure so to be.

Their smoky torches lighted they, and their dim lanterns, to spy out in their dark sinful blindness the bright shining sun of justice, not to be illumined by him that giveth light to every man which cometh into this world, " but to put out clean his everlasting light that cannot possibly be darkened.

And such were the messengers as were they that sent them, who for the maintenance of their own traditions laboured to put down the law of God.

And in like manner do all they yet still in our days pursue Christ also, which to be renowned themselves, do their uttermost deavour " to minish and deface the great glory of God.

But now it were good diligently to note how wavering and variable the estate of man is here. For it was not yet fully five days ago, that both the gentiles for Christ's notable miracles, and his no less virtuous life adjoined thereto, sore longed to see him, and the Jews likewise as he came riding into Jerusalem with marvellous reverence received him; whereas now quite contrary the Jews and the gentiles all at once did jointly go together to take him as chief, with whom Judas being worse than either Jew or gentile not only went in company, but was also their chief guide and ringleader.

And hereby did Christ at his death give all men a right good lesson, to beware that no man living should assure himself of the continuance of any worldly wealth, which is full fickle and unsure, and namely ¹³ that no Christian creature whose whole confidence standeth in the heavenly inheritance, should immoderately desire any vain worldly renown.

The priests, or rather the chief priests, the Pharisees, the scribes, and the ancients of the people, caused this rabble of rascals to be sent against Christ; and surely the better nature that everything is of, the worse waxeth it at length if it once begin to fall out of course. So Lucifer who was by God created in excellency above all the angels in heaven, as soon as he suffered himself to miscarry by pride, became the foulest fiend in hell.

In like case here, it was not the silly ¹⁴ simple souls, but the ancients of the people, the scribes, the Pharisees, the priests and the bishops, the heads and rulers of the priests, whose part it had been to have seen justice executed, and God's cause furthered, these were they, I say, that chiefly conspired together to have the bright sun of justice clearly extinguished, and the only-begotten Son of God most cruelly murdered. To such frantic folly were they brought through covetise, ¹⁵ pride, and envy.

Yet is this point not slightly to be passed over, but advisedly to be considered, how Judas, who divers times in other places was to his reproach called by the name of a traitor, is now here, to his foul shame too, called by the honourable name of an apostle. 'Lo!' saith the evangelist, 'cometh Judas Iscariot one of the twelve.'

Judas Iscariot, I tell you, not one of the faithless paynims, not one of the Jews, Christ's mortal enemies, not one of Christ's mean disciples (and yet who would have suspected any such thing in them?) but one, alas, of Christ's own chosen apostles, is not ashamed here both to deliver his lord and master into their hands, and also to be the head captain of them that should take him himself.

Here have all men that be in office and authority a good lesson to learn, that when they hear themselves solemnly called by names of high honour, cause have they not alway therein greatly to rejoice, and therewith to stand highly in their own conceit, but then especially to reckon the same best to beseem them, if their own conscience do shew them that, for the well doing of their duties in their offices, they do indeed deserve to bear so honourable a name.

Since else may they be full sore ashamed, unless they take pleasure in such bare, vain words, seeing as many as be aloft and in authority, be they great estates, ¹⁶ princes, dukes, emperors, priests, or bishops, if they be naught, must of this be well assured, that whensoever folk do ring

in their itching ears such gay glorious titles of office, they do it not with their heart truly to honour them, but the more freely under a colour of praise covertly to control them, for those honourable rooms ¹⁷ so unworthily used.

And how little the evangelist meant to commend Judas, where he set him forth by the solemn name of his apostleship, saying: 'Judas Iscariot one of the twelve,' he plainly declareth in that a little after he calleth him likewise traitor.

'The traitor,' saith he, 'had given them a token, saying: Whomsoever I shall kiss, he it is, take hold on him.'

Upon this is there a question moved among, ¹⁸ wherefore it was needful for the traitor to give his company a privy token whereby Jesus might be discerned from the rest. Whereunto some answer thus, that for this respect they agreed upon a privy token, because Christ had divers times before suddenly escaped their hands, when they went about to take him. Howbeit seeing he was wont so to escape in the daytime, even out of their hands that very well knew him, by the power of his godhead, either vanishing out of their sight, or passing through the thickest of them, while they were amazed, this privy token given to know him by could little have served them to keep him from escaping.

And therefore do some other say that the one of the Jameses was so like unto Christ (for which cause they think also he was called our Lord's brother) that unless men did well eye them both, the one could not lightly be known from the other. But seeing they might have apprehended them both, and carried them both away with them into some place where they might at more leisure, having them both together, easily have discerned them, what needed them to care for any privy token at all? The night, as appeareth by the gospel, was far spent indeed. And albeit it was almost break of day, yet was it night still. And that it was dark too, testified the torches and lanterns which they brought thither with them, the light whereof so dimmed their sight, that in so far a distance they could not so easily discern other folk, as other might do them. And notwithstanding, by reason the moon was at the full, the night peradventure was meetly light, yet could that serve them no further, but to see afar off the bigness of their bodies, and yet not so distinctly to perceive the proportion and making of them, as thereby to know the one well from the other. Wherefore if they should rashly have rushed in upon them, and every man run at adventure to take them all at once, they might of reason somewhat have doubted lest, as it often times happeneth, among so many some might have chanced to escape, and he most specially for whom they chiefly came, since commonly such as be in greatest hazard will soonest shift for themselves.

Thus whether it was their own device, or that Judas put it first into their heads, so ordered they this wily drift, that the traitor should go foremost, by whose embracing and kiss our Lord might be marked, that when they had all once well viewed him, they might all lay hands upon him at once, and so should it be the less danger, though after any of the rest escaped them.

'Then had the traitor given them a token saying: Whom-soever I shall kiss, he it is, hold him fast, and carry him warily.'

Lo! what avarice bringeth a man unto! Had it not been enough for thee, thou vile wretched traitor, by the privy token of a kiss to betray thine own dear master (who had so lightly exalted

thee to the room ²⁰ of an apostle) into the hands of such cursed caitiffs, but that thou must take so much care therewithal to have him well and warily carried, for fear after he were taken, he might escape from them again? Thou wert hired but to deliver him, and other appointed to take him, to keep him, and to bring him to his judgement; and thou yet, as though thou hadst not done wretchedly enough for thine own part, meddlest with the soldiers' offices too, and as though the wicked officers that sent them had not given them sufficient charge, much need had they hardly of such a circumspect merchant as thou art, to warn and give them instruction of thine own head beside, that when they had once gotten him, they should be well ware how they carried him.

What, wert thou afraid, lest when thou hadst achieved thy mischievous purpose in delivering Christ unto those ruffians, if by the soldiers' negligence Christ either should have slipped away ere they were ware, or by force taken from them maugre their teeth, ²¹ the thirty groats, the worshipful reward of thine heinous offence, should not have been truly paid thee? Yes, yes, I warrant thee, full surely should they have been paid thee. But as glad as thou art now to have them, as desirous will thou be again to be rid of them when thou once hast them, how-beit in the meanwhile shalt thou work a feat, which though it shall be painful to thy master, and damnable to thyself, shall be nevertheless to a great many right wholesome and profitable.

'Then went Judas before them, and approached near unto Jesus to kiss him, and when he was come straightways preased ²² he unto him and said: Master, good morrow, master, and kissed him. Jesus said unto him: My friend, whereto art thou come? O Judas, doth thou betray the son of man with a kiss?'

Albeit Judas of truth, as the history telleth us, went before this company, yet doth he further in another sense signify, that whereas there be many partners of one evil act, he that committeth it, having cause to forbear it, is in the sight of God accounted the worst of all his fellows.

'And he drew near to kiss him. And when he was come, by and by went he unto him and said: Master, good morrow, master, and kissed him.'

So do they approach unto Christ, so do they salute him, so do they call him master, and so do they kiss him also, that pretending to be Christ's disciples, and in appearance shewing themselves to profess his religion, yet in very deed do by craft and subtlety their uttermost deavours ²³ clearly to overthrow it. So do they salute Christ as their master, that call him master and regard not his commandments. So do those priests likewise kiss him, which consecrate the holy body of Christ, and afterward by false doctrine and evil example of living, kill Christ's members, that is to wit, the souls of Christian men. So do those laymen salute and kiss Christ too, which would be counted for good and devout persons, for that contrary to the long-continued custom and guise of all Christendom, they do now in these later days, like good holy fathers, without any just ground, in despite and reproach of the whole Catholic Church (and therefore not without their grievous offence to Godward) by the setting on of evil priests, not alonely ²⁴ themselves receive the blessed body and blood of Christ under both kinds (which thing yet might somewhat be borne withal) but condemn all other that receive the same body and blood but under one kind only, which is as much to say as they condemn all Christian people that have been so many years in all parts of the world, except themselves alone.

And albeit they frowardly maintain that the laity ought to receive both kinds, yet as for the thing ²⁴ of the sacrament, the body and blood of Christ I mean, that do the most part of them, as well

laymen as priests, from either kind clearly take away, leaving no more therein but the bare names of his body and blood alone.

And in this behalf are these folk not much unlike to Pilate's soldiers, who in derision of Christ upon their knees saluted him King of Jews. For even so fare they also, that with reverence kneeling upon their knees name the sacrament of the altar the body and blood of Christ, whereas they believe neither nother ^s to be there, no more than Pilate's men believed him to be a king.

Verily all these, whom I have here rehearsed you, do, in their salutation and false traitorous kiss, plainly play us the traitor Judas's part.

But now as these folk play Judas's part long after he is gone, so did Joab ^s in a figure play his part long before he came, who (as it is written in the twentieth chapter of the Second Book of Kings) while he thus saluted Amasa: 'God speed you, mine own good brother,' and with his right hand lovingly took him by the chin as though he would have kissed him, privily drew out a sword there-whiles unwares unto the other, wherewith at a stroke through both his sides he struck him stark dead at once. And a good while afore this had he by a like train ^s murdered Abner. But afterward, as reason was, being slain himself, he received his just reward for that wretched traitorous guile.

This Judas followed the said Joab outright, whether ye consider the estate of his person, or his mischievous drift, or the vengeance of God, and the miserable end of them both, saving that Judas in every point too too far exceeded Joab. For as Joab was in great favour with his prince, so was Judas, and in much more, and with a mightier prince too. And as Joab slew his friend Amasa, so Judas slew Jesus, a far greater friend, and thereto withal his most loving master. And as Joab killed Amasa upon malice and ambition, because it was told him that Amasa was like to grow in more estimation with his prince than he, so Judas through covetise of wretched worldly winning, for a small sum of money, traitorously delivered his own master to death. And therefore as his trespass was a great deal more heinous, so was the manner of his well-deserved end much more piteous and lamentable.

For whereas Joab was slain by another, Judas with his own hands most wretchedly hung himself. But in the traitorous contriving of mischief, were the abomin-able enterprises of them both not much unlike, since as Joab familiarly speaking to Amasa and pretending friendly to kiss him, shamefully slew him, so came Judas gently to Christ, saluted him reverently, and kissed him lovingly, whereas nought else minded this cursed caitiff all the while, but how to deliver his dear master to death.

Nevertheless though Joab by such coloured amity deceived Amasa, yet could not Judas so deceive Christ, who at his coming kindly received him, heard him salute him, refused not to be kissed of him, and as privy as he was of all his detestable treason, yet for a while so used he himself, as if he had known nothing thereof at all.

And why did he this, trow ye? Was it for that he would teach us to counterfeit and dissimule, and like crafty worldly folk to avoid one wily drift ^s by another? No, no, he meant nothing so, but rather to give us a lesson patiently and meekly to suffer all wrongs and false contrived trains,

clxxxiii and not to scorn and rage, not to covet to be revenged, not by evil language uttered again to ease our shrewd stomachs, not to take any vain delight deceitfully to beguile our enemy, but against craft and falsehood to use upright dealing, and by goodness to master evil, and with sweet and sour words, to labour by all means possible, both in time and out of time, to make good men of bad, so that if any man be incurably diseased, he have none occasion to impute it to any negligence on our behalf, but to the outrage of his own mischievous disease.

So Christ, like a most gracious physician, proved » both these ways to cure the traitor Judas. And first beginning with gentleness: ‘My friend,’ quoth he, ‘for what purpose cometh thou?’

Now albeit the traitor at this word friend, somewhat began to stagger, as he that upon the remembrance of his high treason feared that by the name of friend Christ sore charged him with his wretched mortal malice, yet on the other side, as commonly evil-disposed persons be ever in good hope still to be unknown, this mad blind wretch trusted, for all he had so oft by experience perceived that Christ perfectly knew men's thoughts, and that his own treason too was meetly well touched at the supper, yet this mad fond fool, I say, forgetting all together, was ever more in good hope that Christ little wist his intent. But forasmuch as nothing could be more harmful unto him than to be still fondly fed upon such vain hope (for it was the thing indeed that most hindered his amendment) Christ of his goodness would no longer suffer him to conceive fond comfort in trust that he nothing wist of his false dealing, but straightways sharply added thereunto: ‘O Judas, dost thou betray the son of man with a kiss?’

Here called he him by his name as he was wont to do, to the intent upon remembrance of old amity, the traitor's heart might have relented and fallen to repent-ance. His treason also openly laid he to his charge, that while he might perceive it was not unknown, he should never be ashamed to confess his fault. Over this the traitor's shameful hypocrisy did he bitterly touch, in these words: ‘Dost thou betray the son of man with a kiss?’

Among all sorts of mischief none can there lightly be found more odious unto God, than when we abuse things that be of their own nature good, and turn them contrariwise to serve us in our lewdness. » And for this consideration doth God much mislike lying, for that the words which were by him ordained truly to express our minds by, we falsely pervert to a quite contrary use. In which sort and manner doth he grievously displease God also, that misturneth those laws that were devised to defend men from wrong, to be instruments to wrong men by.

Christ therefore checked and controlled Judas for this detestable kind of offence, where he said: ‘O Judas, dost thou betray the son of man with a kiss?’

‘Either be thou such as thou wouldst be taken for, or plainly shew thyself as thou art indeed. For whoso under the colour of friendship worketh an unfriendly part, doubleth wretchedly his own offence thereby. Was it not enough for thee, then, O Judas, to betray the Son of Man, the son of that man forsooth I mean, through whose default all mankind had been utterly lost for ever, had not this same Son of Man, whom thou devisest to destroy, redeemed all those that be willing to be saved? Was it not enough for thee, I say, to betray this Son of Man, but thou must betray him with a kiss too, and so make that serve thee to work thy treason by, which was first invented to be an assured token of dear love and charity? I do not so much blame this company here which

by forcible means openly set upon me, as I do thee, O Judas, which with a traitorous kiss dost unto these rude ruffians thus unkindly betray me.'

Now when Christ saw no manner of repentance in this traitor, to declare that he had much rather talk with his open enemies than a privy adversary, and therewith to cause the traitor to perceive how little he passed upon³¹ all his devilish devices, turned straight from him and, unarmed as he was, forth went he unto this armed band. For thus saith the gospel:

'Then Jesus knowing all that should betide him, went forth and said unto them: Whom seek ye? To whom they answered: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said unto them: I am he. And with them stood Judas that betrayed him. And as soon as Jesus had once said: I am he, they went backward and fell down upon the ground.'

O sweet saviour Christ, thou that were lately so sore afraid, and lying prostrate upon the ground in most lamentable manner with a bloody sweat, didst humbly pray unto thy Father to take away the cup of thy bitter passion, art thou now suddenly so clean changed, that like a giant thou leapest out and joyfully runnest forward on thy journey, and thus courageously goeth to meet with those that seek to put thee to a painful passion, and of thine own mind disclovest thyself unto them, that confess they come to seek thee, and for all that do not know thee? Oh! Would God all faint-hearted folk would repair hither, hither I say to this place; here may they be sure to find sufficient matter of comfort, when they shall feel themselves troubled with the extreme dread of death. For as they then suffer agonies with Christ, as they be in fear, in sorrow, in heaviness, and in pain with him, so shall they not fail (if so be they heartily pray, and persevere in the same, and therewithal wholly submit themselves to the will and pleasure of God) sensibly to feel comfort and relief with him. With whose holy spirit so shall they be recomforted, that they shall manifestly perceive the deformity of their old earthly heart by the dew of his celestial grace to be right well reformed, and by putting the wholesome cross of Christ into the water³² of their sorrow, the remembrance of death which was of late so bitter unto them, shall wax pleasant and sweet, and after their heaviness shall follow joy and pleasure, and after their fear, strength and courage, yea and at length death too (which before they so sore abhorred) shall they greatly long for, counting it pain to live, and gain to die, desiring to go hence and to be with Christ.³³

Then came Jesus even hard unto them and asked them this question:

'Whom seek ye? They answered: Jesus of Nazareth. And Judas that betrayed him stood with them. Jesus said unto them: I am he. And as soon as Jesus had said unto them: I am he, they went backward and fell down on the ground.'

If any man in his heart before the less esteemed Christ by reason of the fear and anguish that was so lately in him, now must this manful hardy courage of Christ recover his estimation again, considering he so boldly adventureth to go unto all this armed rout. And as sure as he is to be slain by them (for he foreknew all things that should befall unto him) yet discovereth he himself unto these wretches, albeit they know him not, and thereby voluntarily betaketh himself unto them, as a sacrifice cruelly to be killed of them. And truly this so sudden and so great a change of reason ought much to be marvelled at in his blessed humanity.

But now how good and how marvellous an opinion and estimation of him must this needs engender in all good Christian hearts, to see the power of God so wonderfully work in his tender

human body? For what was the cause, trow you, that none of all those that so busily sought him could at that time know him, being so near unto them and presently talking with them? He had openly preached in the temple, he had overthrown the bankers' tables, and driven them out of the temple too, he had evermore used to be conversant abroad, he had confuted the Pharisees and fully answered the Sadducees, reprov'd the scribes, and the captious question that Herod's soldiers moved unto him by a discreet answer had he clearly avoided, with five loaves of bread he had fed seven thousand persons, the sick had he healed, and raised the dead, he had been in company of all sorts of people, Pharisees, publicans, rich, poor, good, bad, Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. And now of all this number was there not one that could discern him, while he stood hard by them and spake unto them, neither by his visage, nor yet by his speech, as though the senders had of purpose provided such messengers as among them all that then came to fetch him, there should not one be sent thither that ever had seen him before. Why was there none that had marked him at the leastwise by Judas's talk with him? Or by his embracing of him? Or by the kiss he gave him for a privy token whereby he might be known? What, had the traitor himself that at the same time was there among them so soon forgotten him, when he had but a little before by a kiss betrayed him? Whereof rose then this strange and wonderful chance?

The reason why none of them all could know him was the selfsame that within a little while after caused likewise that until he revealed himself, neither Mary Magdalen when she saw him, nor neither nother * of his two disciples while they communed with him, wist what he was, but as they took him for some wayfaring man, so took she him but for a gardener.

Finally, if you will needs learn how it happened that none of them all had any power to know him, for all he was present among them and talked with them, it came, ye may be sure, of no other cause, but even of the same that made, as ye see here, that none of them all was able to stand on his feet, as long as he spake to them. For as soon as Jesus had said: 'I am he,' they went backward and fell flat to the ground.

Here did Christ verily prove himself to be that word of God which much more pierceth than any double sword.

Some folk say indeed, the nature of lightning is such that it will melt the sword and never hurt the scabbard. But very true it is that the only voice of Christ, without any harm of their bodies, so weakened their natural strength that no power was there left in them to bear up their limbs withal.

Here telleth the evangelist that Judas stood also with them. For when he heard Christ so plainly lay his treason unto him, either for shame or for fear (for he wist well enough how fierce of nature Peter was) he drew back by and by, and retired to his company again. And why does the evangelist make mention of Judas's stand-ing amongst them, but to make us understand that he likewise fell down with them? And surely such a wretch was Judas that in all the company there was not a worse, nor a more worthy to have a fall.

But hereby meant the evangelist to give every man a general warning to take good heed what company he keepeth, for fear if he match himself with evil folk, with them may he fortune to

fall. Since seldom chanceth it that whoso like a fool placeth himself in a leaking ship with such as after by misfortune be cast into the sea, doth escape alive to land, and all the rest be drowned.

None I think doubteth but that he which was able to throw them down every one with a word, could as easily have given them so sore a fall that none of them all should ever have been able to rise again. But Christ who gave them this fall to make them know that more could they not do unto him than he listed to permit them, licenced them to rise again to do that unto him that it pleased himself to suffer.

'So when they were risen, he asked them again: Whom seek ye? And they answered: Jesus of Nazareth.'

By this one point may every man perceive that by Christ's coming unto them they were so dismayed, so astonied³⁵ and amazed, that as it seemed they were almost out of their wits. For hereof might they have been sure enough, that at that time of night and in that place should they none find but some, either of Christ's own disciples, or at the leastwise some friend of his, who would rather have conveyed them any way else than have conducted them where Jesus was. And yet did they like fools even at the first meeting fondly blab out at once, unto one whom they neither wist what he was, nor why he asked them that question, the effect of all their errand, which in any wise should have been kept close until they had achieved their purpose. For as soon as he asked them: 'Whom would ye have?' they answered and said: 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus answered again: 'I told ye that I am he, wherefore if you would have me, let these my disciples depart.' As who would say: 'If ye would have me, seeing I am now come to ye, and tell ye myself who I am, now ye thus know me, why do ye not straightways take me?'

'But of truth so far unable are ye to take me except I give you leave that (as ye have by your falling backward already right effectually proved) ye have no power so much as to stand while I do but speak to you. Never-theless, if all these things be so soon so clean out of your minds, now once again I put you in remembrance that I am Jesus of Nazareth. Wherefore if you seek me, suffer these my disciples to depart.'

Where Christ here sayeth: 'Let these my disciples depart,' that he meant not thereby to ask leave for them to go, shewed he sufficiently, I trow, by that he struck them so flat to the ground.

But other whiles happeth it among them that they that go about a mischievous matter be not contented to do one mischief alone, but of their own ungracious dispositions commonly covet to add more thereto than the business they have in hand, of any necessity, requireth. And some also that help forth other men's shameful enterprises, be so forward and so more than needeth trusteth³⁶ therein, that rather than leave any ungracious act undone that they are appointed unto, they will put somewhat more to it of their own heads beside. Both which sorts of folk doth Christ here privily touch, where he saith: 'If you would have me, suffer these my disciples to depart. If it be my blood that the bishops, the scribes, the Pharisees, and the ancients of the people do so sore thirst for, lo! at your first seeking was I ready to meet you; and where you knew me not I disclosed myself unto you; while ye lay on the ground I stood hard by you; now you are risen here am I present for you to take me. And finally which the traitor could never have done, here deliver I myself into your hands to the end neither you nor they shall think that (as though you

had not done lewdly enough to contrive my death) needs must ye shed their blood too. For which cause if ye seek me,' said he, 'let these my disciples depart.'

He bade them let them go, but maugre their hearts ³⁷ he wrought to have it so. And while they were busy to have caught them, he caused his disciples to flee; and so preserving them all, clearly disappointed all those caitiffs' purpose. For declaration of which effect to follow, these words spake he beforehand unto them: 'Let these my disciples depart,' whereby this his own saying also was verified: 'Of all those thou gavest me have I not lost one.'

These words of Christ which the evangelist here mentioneth were those that Christ spake unto his Father the same night at his maundy: 'O Holy Father save them for thy name's sake whom thou hast given unto me.' And a little after: 'I have kept safe all that thou gavest me and none of them hath perished but the son of perdition, whereby the scripture is fulfilled.'³⁸

Here lo! Christ prophesying that his disciples should be saved harmless although himself were taken, foreshewed thereby that he and none else preserved them. By reason whereof doth the evangelist put the same in the readers' remembrance, to let them wit that albeit Christ in this place said unto these folk: 'Suffer these my disciples to depart,' himself for all that by his privy power had made open the way for them to escape.

That place of scripture that foresheweth the destruction of Judas is, by the way of prayer, prophesied in the hundred and eighth psalm of David in this manner. 'Let his days be shortened and another take his room.'³⁹ These words though they were forespoken so many years before of the traitor Judas, yet until Christ so taught us, and the deed self after compared with the said words so proved the same, whether any man else save only he that spake them did ever till that time so understand them, I cannot surely tell. For it followeth not that everything that one prophet foreseeeth is foreseen of all the rest beside, since the spirit of prophecy is to prophets proportioned by measure. Yea, and further of this opinion am I, that no man hath so clear understanding of holy scripture in all places, but that as yet there are many hidden mysteries remaining unperceived therein, such as concern either Antichrist's time or the day of judgement. Which albeit they are for the mean-while unknown, Elias yet at his coming again shall at last openly reveal.

Wherefore as the apostle spake of the wisdom of God, so may I of holy writ (wherein God hath laid up and hidden great heaps of his wisdom) right well cry out and say: 'O the depth of the marvellous high wisdom and knowledge of God! How far be the judgements of God above the capacity of man's wit, and how unsearchable be his ways!' ⁴⁰ And yet for all this do there in every corner nowadays still start up amongst us, as it were swarms of wasps or hornets which of a certain pride call themselves, as St. Jerome termeth them, *autodidactons*, that is to wit, of themselves learned without any man's teaching, and boast likewise that without the commentaries of the old doctors they have found all those points open, plain, and easy, which all the ancient fathers, men of as excellent wit and no less learning than they, and over that all given to continual study, and touching the spirit of God (whereof they as much babble as they little have) as far beyond them as they passed them in godly living, confessed to be right hard and cumbrous. But now these newfound divines, that are thus suddenly sprung up of nought, which would so fain seem to know all things, besides that they vary from all those good godly men in

the understanding of scripture, agree not within themselves, neither in the principal points of Christ's religion, and nevertheless every one of them bold bearing folk in hand that they have spied out the truth, as they put other of like sort to rebuke and shame, so by other do they take shame themselves. And as they altogether labour to destroy and overthrow the whole Catholic faith, so are they all the whole rabble of them brought to confusion themselves, whose wretched and foolish enterprises, God that dwelleth in heaven loud laugheth to scorn, whom I most humbly beseech, that he so laugh them not to scorn as he laugh at their eternal damnation, but inspire into their hearts his wholesome grace of repentance, whereby though they, like unthrifty prodigal children, have strayed too long, alas, abroad, they may yet at length return from whence they came unto their mother the Church afresh, to the intent we and they together agreeing in one true faith of Christ, and knit in mutual love and charity, may as his true members attain unto the glory of our captain and head, which whosoever hopeth to have out of this body, the Church, and without the right faith, doth with a vain hope lewdly deceive himself.

But now as I was about to tell you, that this prophecy was meant by Judas did Christ somewhat give warning afore, and Judas by the murdering of himself did plainly declare it, and Peter afterward so expounded it, and all the apostles too, which at length executed the same, when by lot they admitted Matthias to his room, so that then did there in very deed another take his place. And to make the matter the clearer (albeit bishops do still from time to time succeed into the apostles' places) yet into that number of the twelve, after Matthias was once chosen in Judas's stead, was there never none taken in again, but the office of the apostles being little and little appointed unto many, both was the aforesaid prophecy fulfilled, and that holy number therewith fully at an end. Wherefore when Christ said: 'Suffer these my disciples to depart,' he desired not leave for them to depart, but in a manner told them that he himself licenced his disciples so to do, to verify that he had erst spoken: 'Father, I have kept those that thou gavest me, and not one of them hath perished, but the son of perdition.'

Here methinketh it good somewhat to weigh how effectually in these words Christ foretold two things so far unlike as the desperate death of the traitor and the good success of the rest. For so certainly did he tell what should become of both parties, that he spake thereof as of a thing not to come, but rather past already. 'Those that thou gavest me,' said he, 'them have I kept. Neither were they saved harmless by their own strength, nor preserved by any gentleness on the Jews' behalf, nor escaped away for fault of diligence in Pilate's men, but I have safely kept them, and none of them all hath miscarried, but only the son of perdition. For of them whom thou, O Father, gavest me, was he verily one. And I, while he at my choosing of him willingly received me, set him at free liberty to become the child of God with the remnant that received me. But as soon as he of a covetous mind fondly betook himself unto the devil and forsook me, and falsely betraying me refused to be saved by me, while he went about to destroy me he fell to be the son of perdition. And thus like a wretch wretchedly cast he himself away.'

And so well assured was Christ, what end this traitor should have, and so undoubtedly shewed he that he should come to nought, that he plainly said he was already lost. This notwithstanding, all the while Christ was in taking, still stood with a full furious stomach this wretched traitor amongst those that took him, as their head captain and banner-bearer, triumphing of likelihood and rejoicing to behold what peril his own fellows and his master were in. And I verily think he looked for none other but to have had them taken and slain every one. For such is the mad

naughty nature of ungrateful folk, that whom they have once unjustly dealt with, those would they gladly have rid out of the way, so sore doth their sinful wounded conscience dread the reproach of their unkind dealing. Thus was this traitor full glad, while he hoped to have had all his fellows in hold at once, and like a fool cast no perils of himself at all, nothing less mistrusting than that shortly after the dreadful sentence of God should light upon him, so that he with his own hands should most horribly hang himself.

Here have I occasion to lament and bewail the blindness of our miserable mortal nature. For many times while we are in most trouble and fear, though we know it not, be we in most surety. And contrariwise, oftentimes while we reckon ourselves surest and make most merry, then unawares stealeth death even suddenly on us. All the apostles save Judas were very sore afraid, reckoning to have been carried away and put to death with Christ. And yet were they all in case safely to escape, whereas Judas on the other side which nothing feared at all, but took a special pleasure to see them so afflicted, lost his life for ever and that in few hours after.

A cruel delight it is and very unnatural, to rejoice and take comfort at others' woe and misery. Never the more cause hath any man to rejoice or to account his luck the better, for having power upon anybody's life or death, as the traitor trowed he had, when he had gotten this band of soldiers unto him. Since of this may every man be right sure, that whomsoever he slayeth, by death shall he him follow. Yea and so uncertain is the hour of death, that the party that so boldly boasteth to despatch another first, may fortune for all that to go before himself; as it here fared by Judas, who delivered Christ to the Jews to be put to death, and yet did he first miserably murder himself.

A heavy and dreadful precedent for the whole world to beware, that no man reckon himself free from God's vengeance, that without all fear of God presumptuously attempteth mischief, never taking any recourse ^{or} thereof. For all creatures do agree to work with their Creator to chastise and punish the evil. The air is ready with noisome and evil breaths to infect and poison them, the water with waves to drown them, the mountains to overwhelm them, the vales to rise up against them, the earth to gape and open under them, hell suddenly to swallow them down, and there the devil headlong deep to plunge them in flaming fiery pits that shall continue for ever. And all this while doth God alone preserve this silly ^{or} wretched man for all he hath too foully forsaken him. But he that so followeth this stubborn stiff-necked Judas, that after grace so often offered, and as oft again refused, God at length determineth to offer it him no more, this man is undoubtedly in a very miserable case, this man, I say, in how good plight so ever he fondly weeneth himself to be, and seem he to flee never so high in the air, yet walloweth he indeed full low in all sorrow and wretchedness.

Wherefore let us make our prayer unto our most pitiful Saviour Christ, not each one for himself alone, but every man for other too, that we follow not the example of the obstinate traitor Judas, but without delay gladly embracing God's grace when it is offered us, may through our own repentance and his mercy, be renewed afresh to attain his endless glory.

‘OF THE CUTTING OF MALCHUS'S EAR.’

Albeit the apostles, when they first heard Christ tell them before, of the things which they now saw themselves, were thereat full sorry and sad, yet much less did it grieve them then than now, when they presently beheld them with their own eyes. For as soon as they espied so many come upon them at once, and openly said they sought Jesus of Nazareth, no longer could they stand in doubt, but that they so sought for him purposely to apprehend him. And thereupon perceiving what was like to ensue thereon, sundry matters as in such a sudden stir very sore perplexed them. First the earnest care they had for their dear beloved master, over this the dread they stood in what might fall on themselves, and last of all the shame they had to break their bold boast and promise, where everyone precisely said he would never forsake his master, no not to die therefor.

Thus were their minds with divers perplexities diversly distracted. For as the love of their master moved them to avoid, * so the fear of themselves willed them to flee. And as dread of death drave them fast away, so did the shame to break their promise persuade them still to tarry. Again they right well remembered how Christ had before time charged that none of them for his own defence should carry neither stick nor staff, whereas now the same night he gave a contrary commandment, that whoso lacked a sword should sell his coat to buy him one withal; and all were it so, that they, being but eleven in number, and thereto so destitute of weapons that, save only two of them, never a one had any about him, except haply some knife to cut his meat withal, were sore afflicted * to see such a sort of the Jews besides the Roman soldiers, all so well armed, stand there so thick thronging together about them, yet as soon as they bethought them that when they had said unto Christ: 'Lo! here are two swords,' Christ answered: 'They are enough,' they, not understanding what was the mystical meaning of the matter, suddenly asked Christ all in haste, whether they should defend him by sword, saying: 'Lord, shall we strike with the sword?' But Peter for the fervent affection he bare to his master, before he had his answer drew out his sword, and striking at the bishop's servant, cut off his right ear clean, either for that it was his chance to stand there next unto him, or else because among them all there was none so busy a braggart. And out of question it appeareth that he was some very lewd losel, * for the evangelists write of him that he was servant to the bishop who was high priest or prince of the priests. And commonly, as Juvenal saith: 'Great men's houses be well stored with saucy malapert merchants.' * And men learn by their own experience that in every country noblemen's servants be statlier and much more extreme than are their lords themselves.

Now to let us know that this fellow bare some rule with the bishop, and took therefore somewhat the more upon him, St. John immediately after addeth his name too, saying, 'This servant's name was Malchus,' which thing the evangelist seldom useth without it be for some purpose. And thereupon think I that this javel * that so fiercely rushed in among them set Peter in such a heat that he first began with him, and so would stoutly have proceeded further, had not Christ stayed his bold courageous stomach, ere that he went too far. Who by and by (as he that came not to avoid death, but to suffer it, and if he had been otherwise minded, yet little need had he of any such aid) both tempered the residue of his apostles, and reprov'd Peter's outrageous zeal, and also restored the vile wretch his ear again.

For the plainer declaration whereof, first answered he his other disciples to their demands, saying: 'Let them alone, yet a little while longer suffer them. For I that with one word overthrew them all at once, was, as ye see, content for all that to let them rise again, and so for this once to work their wills upon me. As yet then those whom I myself do suffer, them suffer ye also. And

the time is almost come, in which I shall no more suffer them to have any power upon me. And now in the meanwhile neither need have I none of your help at all.’

This was all his answer lo! that he made unto the rest: ‘Suffer them yet awhile.’ But severally turning unto Peter: ⁴⁸ ‘Put up,’ quoth he, ‘thy sword into his Place’; as though he would say: ‘I will not be defended by sword.’ And such a state have I chosen thee unto, that I will not have thee fight with this kind of sword, but with the sword of God's word. Let this material sword, therefore, be put up into his place, that is to wit into the hands of temporal princes, as into his scabbard again, to punish malefactors withal. Ye that be apostles of my flock have another manner of sword than this, perdy, ⁴⁹ much more terrible than is any sword made of iron or steel. For by that sword, whatsoever evil person is once cast out of the Church, that is to be understanden as a rotten member cut off from my mystical body, is delivered sometime to the devil's hands only to chastise his flesh, to the end his soul may be saved, if so be there remain any hope of amendment in him, and that he may be grafted and knit into my body afresh.

‘And other whiles if he be so desperately diseased, that he be past all recovery, then for fear the infection of him might haply hurt the whole and sound, is he perpetually condemned unto the invisible death of his soul also. And of truth so loath am I to have ye fight with this temporal sword (the meetest scabbard for which, mark well what I say unto ye, are the secular justices) that I could not advise you to occupy the spiritual sword (the use whereof pertaineth to you alone) not very often neither, but valiantly bestirring yourself with the sword of God's word (the cut whereof like a little lancing knife may let out the foul corruption of the soul, and so wound it to the great help and health thereof) as for the other terrible and dangerous sword of excommunication, that would I have you always keep within the scabbard of mercy and pity, till an urgent and wondrous necessary cause enforce you to draw it out.

Thus whereas to the remnant of his apostles he spake not passing two words or three, either for that they were meek and mild of spirit, or not so hot as Peter was, Peter's fierce unbridled braids ⁵⁰ he calmed and quieted with a far longer process. For he did not alonely ⁵¹ bid him to put up his sword, but told him also the cause why he misliked his zeal, how well so ever he meant therein.

From *St. Thomas More's History of the Passion*, Ed. P. E. Hallett, Trans. Mary Bassett. London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1941, pp. 74-105.

¹ halberds.

² only.

³ violently.

⁴ Terence, *Heaut.*, I, i, 25.

⁵ care.

⁶ fellow.

⁷ wicked.

⁸ i.e. *par Dieu* .

⁹ evil.

¹⁰ 2 Tim. ii, 17.

¹¹ John i, 9.

¹² endeavour.

- ¹³ especially.
- ¹⁴ poor.
- ¹⁵ covetousness.
- ¹⁶ dignitaries.
- ¹⁷ positions, offices.
- ¹⁸ sometimes.
- ¹⁹ office, dignity.
- ¹⁹
- ²⁰ against their will.
- ²¹ pressed forward.
- ²² endeavour.
- ²³ only.
- ²⁴ The thing (*res sacramenti*) is the spiritual context as dis-tinguished from the outer sign, cf St. Thomas, *Sum. Theol .*, III, 66, i, ad 1.
- ²⁵ the one nor the other.
- ²⁶ Rastell prints Joas for Joab. The Louvain edition of the Latin works (1566) has correctly Joab.
- ²⁷ stratagem.
- ²⁸ trick, stratagem.
- ²⁹ tried.
- ³⁰ any kind of wickedness.
- ³¹ regarded.
- ³² cf. Exod. xv, 23.
- ³³ cf. Phil. i, 21.
- ³⁴ the one nor the other.
- ³⁵ astonished.
- ³⁶ Perhaps a mistake by Rastell for ‘trusty’ (*praepostere fidi*).
- ³⁷ against their wills.
- ³⁸ John xvii, 12.
- ³⁹ place, office.
- ⁴⁰ Rom. xi, 33.
- ⁴¹ perhaps for ‘remorse,’ as it seems to translate the *impoenitentia* of the original.
- ⁴² miserable.
- ⁴³ probably for ‘abide’ or perhaps for ‘ not to avoid ‘ (i.e. run away)-- *ne fugiant* .
- ⁴⁴ Rastell prints ‘afflighted,’ but the Latin suggests ‘affrighted.’
- ⁴⁵ a worthless fellow.
- ⁴⁶ *Maxima quaeque domus servis est plena superbis* , Sat. V, 66. Some editors mark the line as spurious.
- ⁴⁷ rogue.
- ⁴⁸ i.e. addressing Peter alone.
- ⁴⁹ *par Dieu*.
- ⁵⁰ bursts of passion.
- ⁵¹ only.