

There are four chapters in St. John's Gospel: 14, 15, 16, and 17 which are filled with the words of our Lord. Comforting words. Words of peace and assurance. Some of these words were read at the funeral of your loved one: *"Let not your hearts be troubled...in My Father's house are many rooms...and I go to prepare a place for you."* Some of these words were given to you as a confirmation verse: *"I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through Me."* *"I am the Vine, you are the branches; Abide in Me and I in you."*

All the words contained in these four chapters Jesus spoke to His disciples in the Upper Room right before He was arrested, tried, and crucified. All of His disciples heard these words except Judas. Judas heard none of them. He left the room to be the guide for those who would arrest Jesus in Gethsemane. He left in Chapter 13 before Jesus spoke His words of comfort.

The words you cherish, the words with which you buried your loved one, never even entered into the ears of Judas because, as Peter says in our Acts Reading, *"he turned aside to go to his own place."* His own place was not with the other disciples. His own place was not with Jesus.

Do you understand, therefore, why Jesus in our text prays for His disciples to be and remain one? This is the place for Jesus' disciples. To remain where Jesus placed you in your baptism. One with Him, with His Father, with the Holy Spirit, and with all other believers.

In this Judas stands as a warning. He is the shipwreck visible just off the coast. And all who see his ghastly remains pass by in silence. This is what happens when you go your own way, when you leave the fellowship of Jesus' disciples.

Judas was the guide for those who arrested Jesus. But even today he is a guide. A guide to those who, sadly and tragically, follow him in going to their own place and not the place of their baptism, not the place with Jesus' disciples.

Is Judas your guide and mine? We would all follow him. We would all let him be our guide. Except for this. In the Upper Room, long before you were born, Jesus was praying for you. He was praying that you would remain one. One with Him and with all believers. Praying that you would not go to your own place but remain where Jesus placed you.

As much as Judas is a warning for us, Jesus' prayer is assuring comfort for us. Maybe you caught this, maybe you didn't. In His prayer, these words: *"You (Father) loved them even as You loved Me... The love with which You (Father) have loved Me (is) in them."*

Who is *them*? You! You are them. He is praying for you. And what Jesus is saying here is utterly remarkable. God the Father has the same love for believers as He has for Jesus. The love He has for you is identical to the love He has for Jesus.

It is impossible, therefore, for God to love you any more than He already does. There is no greater love than the love He has for you because it is the same love He has for Jesus.

Is it any wonder, then, why He sent Jesus to die on the cross for you? There is no greater love. In fact, think of the Father's love for His Son in this way: He doesn't love Him only because He is

one with Him and with the Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity. He has such great love for His beloved Son also because He was willing to come and be your Savior; to suffer and die on the cross in utter agony for you so that you will be with Him forever in heaven.

And of this there is no doubt. There are absolutely no conditions in Jesus' prayer. No "if this" or "if that." No! Every word He prays is of certainty and complete assurance.

Your place is not Judas' place. Jesus gave you the place with Him and with all His disciples in your baptism. And no one can take that place from you. And because Jesus prays that you remain one with Him and with all believers, the place of your baptism is your place with Jesus not only now but for all eternity.

And my dear friend, that wickedness you did last week has no say in the matter. All those awful sins in your past must shut their mouths when Jesus prays. And it's because right after He prayed for you, He went to the cross to die for you.

It's done, and nothing can undo it. Your sins, all of them, even the worst of them, they are all forgiven, all of them. Jesus' blood was poured out for you. And His blood speaks as loudly as Jesus' prayer for you. God the Father forgives you. Be assured. Be comforted. Your sins cannot keep you out of heaven because your baptism into Christ already now gives heaven to you, and here is where Jesus has placed you. Amen.