

It is easy to tell who the bad guys are in the story of our Lord's passion. Judas, out of greed or jealousy, betrays Jesus to those who hate him. The Sanhedrin bring false witnesses against Jesus to convict him, and hand him over to the Romans to be crucified. Pilate knows that Jesus is an innocent man, but out of fear of the crowds he allows Jesus to be killed. The soldiers abuse and mock Jesus before they crucify him. All of these characters were active in their role of Jesus' crucifixion. We usually do not identify with these characters of the story, because their actions are so sinful and so hateful of Jesus that we are repulsed by them.

But there is another set of characters in whom we may have an easier time recognizing ourselves. The disciples of Jesus who abandoned him when he was arrested. Peter, who denied that he knew Jesus when those who were hostile to him questioned him. These were people who loved Jesus, even while they were betraying him. But their weakness and fear overcame them, and they were unable to remain faithful when they were faced with a difficult situation.

We all know what it is like to be weak in the face of temptation, in the face of sin. We are probably not tempted by every kind of sin, but there is always at least one area of our life, one difficult situation where it seems like it is just too hard to remain faithful and do what we know is right, so we give in to our weakness.

This is the sin of Jesus' disciples and of Peter, and this is why the story of our Lord's passion and the betrayal by those whom he loved is our own story. We, too, are

characters in the narrative of the Lord's passion. We enter into it every time we flee from the Lord because staying with him will mean trials and suffering. And like Peter, when we stop and realize what we have just done, we weep bitterly, maybe not outwardly but within our souls, because we are so sorry for what we've done.

But this story that we are a part of is not a tragedy. When we recount our Lord's passion, we should grieve because of the part we've played in it, but in the end we rejoice because our Lord freely chose to play his part as well. He says to his disciples, "Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and He will not provide me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels? But then how would the Scriptures be fulfilled which say that it must come to pass in this way?" The Lord's love is stronger than our sin. When he stretches out his hands on the cross, he takes all of our sins, to the very heart of them, and he removes them from our souls. That is why we sing for joy and praise the Lord in our words and actions, because of our gratitude for this unimaginable gift of love.

And now we continue the story. I've heard people use the phrase, "back in the time of the New Testament" as if that referred to the past. We are in the time of the New Testament. We may not add any more books to the bible, but our words and actions are as much a part of the New Testament as the words and actions of the first Christians. So just like Peter and the other disciples, let us return to Jesus, and continue with the mission of spreading Christ's love to others. That is the part of the New Testament that we write today.