St Thomas vs Judas Iscariot 4-19-20 Vernon Romantic vs Realist

I want to compare and contrast two people that were instrumental in the story of our Lord's crucifixion and Resurrection; namely Judas Iscariot and St Thomas.

I alluded to this in a homily during Holy Week (I think). I called Judas a 'dreamer' and a 'romantic' and I want to expand upon this a little. I use the term 'romantic' not in the candles and wine sense of the term. 'Romantic' today is generally understood as meaning love between a man and woman like in a movie that is a 'romantic' comedy. That's not what I mean. I mean 'romantic' in the sense of having an ideal of how things should be, having a dream of the world as being a perfect place of faultless justice and peace.

Judas Iscariot had such a dream. Based on the information we can glean from the gospels he seemed to have projected his romantic notions onto Jesus. He believed in Jesus as a deliverer of Israel from Roman rule. He saw Jesus as come to reestablish the Davidic monarchy through military force. In Judas mind Jesus' mission should have been to rally the Jewish people around Himself as the heir of King David, forcefully expel the Romans from Palestine and establish a new Jewish kingdom where God could be worshiped as of old. This (as far as we can tell) was Judas' vision. The problem was when it dawned on Judas that this wasn't a vision shared with Jesus Himself, Judas turned on Jesus in furious anger and so betrayed Him. In other words, Judas was going to have the Jesus he envisioned or he wasn't going to have Jesus at all.

Paul Johnson calls Adolf Hitler the great Romantic of the 20th century. This sounds strange, but there is an excellent case to be made that this is true. Hitler was sentimental about animals and children. He considered himself to be an artist and his taste in music beyond reproach. He was a vegetarian and did not drink alcohol, nor did he smoke. Hitler had a vision of what he wanted Germany to be. In his megalomania he expanded his vision to what he wanted Europe to be. He then stretched his vision to what he wanted the whole world to be. His ego grew to Satanic proportions and his pride knew no bounds. He was convinced that his ideal, his vision was the proper one and he would brook no opposition. He could look with indifference at the sufferings of his own soldiers and millions of other people. Why? Because they were dying for a good cause: his ideal of the way things should be. Sixty million people died as a result.

Judas was the forerunner to Hitler in that what he saw as the correct way for Jesus to behave became (for him) the only possible correct way. He wouldn't even accept correction from Jesus Himself. The ideas he had so lovingly nurtured in his mind couldn't be overthrown not even by the Master Himself. So this is why I call Judas a dreamer and a romantic.

Among the disciples Thomas was the opposite of Judas. He is the realist. Do you remember when Jesus made the decision to return to Judea? Thomas growls, 'Let's go die with Him'. I suspect that this comment came after a long argument between Jesus and the disciples. They were using common sense by telling Jesus, 'The Jews want to kill you! And us! We can't return to Judea! It isn't safe!' Thomas seems to have been at the forefront of this dispute. He's applying commonsense reasoning to their situation. 'We are safe here. We are not safe in Judea. Therefore, the wisest course of action is to stay.' It is hard to fault Thomas' reasoning, or at least it's hard for me to fault his reasoning. Looking back, we see that Thomas didn't have all the facts, nor could he see everything from a Godlike perspective like Jesus could. He can hardly be blamed for that. After the disciples saw the Risen Christ, Thomas isn't having it. His realism comes to the fore. He is adamant: 'I don't believe you! He was crucified and buried, that's the end of it. You saw someone that looks like Him, or you are crazy, one or the other.' The disciples insist: They have seen Jesus alive. Thomas says, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." I suspect we are given a shortened version of an extensive squabble between Thomas and the other disciples. But then Jesus appears and invites Thomas to see the nail marks and put his hand into His side and to believe. Thomas is a realist even here. He comes to the only conclusion that's reasonable: 'My Lord and my God!'. So we have a paradox: the ultimate realist is the first to see Jesus for who He truly is, not the romantic. The romantic hanged himself in despair, sacrificing himself to his own ideals.

What's the application of all this for us? We are responsible for trying to make the world a better place before we leave it. But beware the temptation of believing that our vision and understanding is complete and whole! That's the sin of pride: the sin of Hitler and Judas. This is why we are admonished by Sacred Scripture to not put our trust in princes, that is, politicians and great leaders. We should strive to live our lives each and every day the best way we know how. To behave the way we know that God would have us behave; to live according to His Commandments. It's not up to us to remake the world into a perfect Utopia, trusting in our own feeble understanding. That's the road to Hell. We are called to conversion. Individual conversion that is reflected in how we treat our fellow people in a hard world. Seeing Jesus through the eyes of Thomas, as Lord and God, seeing Jesus through the eyes of realism is the key to an ongoing conversion.

And by so doing we will, through God's grace, hear some day, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!'