



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for Holy Monday (30th March) 2026

In their book, *Original Sin*, the journalists Jake Tapper and Alex Thompson chart the events precipitated by Joe Biden's increasing physical and mental frailty leading to his finally withdrawing from the presidential race of 2024. As the public perception that he was just not up to the job embedded itself - rightly or wrongly - some of his colleagues urged him to reflect that he would not want his legacy to be his inevitable defeat at the election and a second Trump presidency.

Those who comment on these sorts of things often tell us that senior politicians and some in other prominent roles worry a lot about their legacy. In this context, legacy is something of a term of art. Their *legacy* in an ordinary sense is set by the consequences of their choices and actions. What is meant by *legacy* in this instance is what they will be remembered for - what we might call their enduring reputation.

Of course, in fact, they have very little control over all of this. Autobiographies might try to shape the memories; but historians and others revisit the subject and time can alter perspectives - positively or negatively.

However, one character from the past has endured a fairly consistent legacy in this restricted sense over the centuries; and that is Judas Iscariot, who for two thousand years has been remembered only as the man who betrayed Jesus.

Yet, in fact, there must have been more to Judas's contribution to the unfolding of Jesus' work than this one deed. In common with many of the Apostles, there is little reference to him during the Gospel accounts; but Saint John, of course, as we have just heard, relates that Judas was a thief in a cameo appearance as a rather mean-spirited member of Jesus' circle.

People often suggest that this story is a complete fabrication, included to discredit Judas in preparation for what is to come. However, whilst the bit about him being a thief might well be a piece of gratuitous defamation, the idea that tensions between Judas and Jesus were beginning to appear might preserve a vague recollection. It has been argued that Judas's betrayal was motivated by disillusion with Jesus, having misunderstood what His task and purpose was. If he had been anticipating some show of force against the Roman or Jewish authorities, he was not alone: those who welcomed Jesus on that first Palm Sunday had similar expectations and elsewhere in the Gospels, we are told that a couple of the Apostles rocked up to the Last Supper armed to the teeth.

Never-the-less, we should not forget that Jesus chose Judas to be one of the Twelve: the inner circle of His associates, who, so far as we can see, were His fairly constant companions for maybe three years. As such, he participated in establishing the embryonic Church, which was sufficiently robust as to reconstitute itself after the Resurrection. In the opening chapters of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, when Matthias is chosen to replace Judas, we learn that the Twelve were recognised as an almost institutional and foundational element in the structures of the Church; and Judas had been part of this as Jesus established His incarnate Ministry.

We might reflect, therefore, that Judas's legacy in the ordinary sense is more than his legacy in terms of that for the which he is generally remembered today.