

“What would ‘Judas’ do?”

By Howard Carpenter

It does not require a seer to prophesy political candidates referencing “what would Jesus do” in perpetuating and seeking to add government programs. Obama (“whatever you do for the least of my brothers, you do for me”) and others – as did our governor in his 2007 “Prescription for Pennsylvania” health plan – have already joined hands to claim Christ’s mantle. In today’s political world, there exists considerable weight in invoking Jesus in promising more manna, manna someone else has to pay for. However, do not look for an offering plate to awaken slumbering generosity, but watch for the passing of another temple tax to steal your silver. After all, is not this “what Jesus would do?”

I anticipate more—from both sides of the political spectrum.

He did illustrate, however, what is often depicted, as something ‘He would do’ is more akin to “what Judas would do.”

Perhaps you recall, at the knee of a pastor or priest, the relevant passage of Mary determined to use her own money to wash her Savior’s feet. The treasurer, Judas, possessing responsibility for the purse, was indignant and claimed Mary’s desired use of her money a waste and was better “spent on the poor.” His incense did not arise from any concern for the poor, but as the text states, how he could “spend it on himself.”

Rather than honor what “Judas would do” in “taking from Mary to give to the poor” position, His retort was to “leave her alone.”

I wonder if the above story is instructive for our legislative – at all levels – leadership and the guilt-ridden sheep pandered to. While proclaiming concern for the poor, those with responsibility for the public purse increasingly authorize the taking of your silver to pass on mere mites to another. Perhaps unmasking the likely real motives (propagate voter dependency and gratitude, increasing one’s power base, building new programs and buildings enshrining one’s “accomplishments”, hiring friends, relatives and supporters, extensive travel & entertainment, bonuses, pensions, marketing [self-promotion] and, as we’ve learned, defense fund accruals) and permit today’s Mary to keep and determine use her labor’s fruit, the poor would be better served.

Leave her alone.

Although persistently challenging personal generosity, Jesus did not condone – nor practice – stealing from one and passing it on to another. It was not His style this forcible taking from Mary, for it betrayed the spirit behind charity’s injunction. Judas was not about generosity, but himself.

Yes, personal care for the poor, hungry, homeless, and imprisoned mirrors “what Jesus would do.” The practice of using the poor (or children, seniors, etc.) as pawns to veil real and selfish motives is not. That this manipulative pandering has failed – and is still failing - to resolve the problem of the poor may explain why Jesus added moments later, “The poor will always be with you.”

He knew “what Judas would do.”