

When Judas went out, Jesus said, "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."

There was something playful about the jazz and swing music of the big bands back in my youthful days. It was like they were having fun. Nowadays and for perhaps the past fifty years the full orchestral assemblies of those days have given way to the din of clashing drums, cymbals and electric guitars.

As for lyrics (like words!) you had brief ballads, two to three stanzas and a choral interval, usually about love like *Gonna take a sentimental journey . . .* or *I'll see you in my dreams . . .*, the kind that put you *In the Mood* as we used to say. Nowadays the lyrics that attract thousands to outdoor concerts have devolved into never ending unintelligible acoustics – sounding very confrontational.

I think that's because nowadays – and for quite some time – sentimentality is out! Confrontation is in; confrontation is "grown up". Society has gone hypercritical; anything like complacency becomes escapist. Which means Hoagy Carmichael's Estate must be losing income – for his ballads were quintessentially sentimental – like *Stardust* or *Skylark* or *Georgia on my Mind*.

But I am a child of those bygone days, so much of it about love. Romantic love, yes, but that's a start, isn't it? Jesus says at his Last Supper (after that accountant Judas leaves), *My children, I give you a new commandment: love one another*. Some later ascetic might warn you that Jesus is talking about a rational, non-sentimental kind of love, more a discipline than a delight – but a Jesus who can weep openly at a friend's funeral had no problem with being sentimental. The value of our biblical portrayal of God is that he/she can be very emotional – like human. Look up the Bible's *Song of Songs*!

I bring up Hoagy Carmichael because lately one of his lyrics came to mind while I was visiting my wife – demented as she is – at her care residence. The song starts off with the composer, having broken off relations with someone, declaring he has steeled himself against any regrets. His emotions are under control, thus: *I get along without you very well, / of course I do . . .* and similarly the second stanza: *I've forgotten you just like I should, / of course I have, . . .* In other words I won't let feelings, a mood, dictate my relationship to Jane – or anything.

But then Hoagy releases the truth, the *fact* of the matter, the thing we are so often taught to conceal, repress – and he does so by way of that *pivotal* word of our language: *Except!* As follows: *Except when soft rains fall / and drip from leaves, then I recall . . .* Then: *Except to hear your name, / or someone's laugh that is the same, . . .* Or in the last stanza: *Except perhaps in Spring, / But I should never think of Spring, / For that would surely break my heart in two.*

Take note of that important word *Except* as the key to one's heart. What is it Jesus asks of us in today's Gospel? He simply asks us to be exceptional – to make of love our fundamental way of Being.

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