

Monday of Holy Week

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 42.1-9	'Here is my servant, whom I uphold'
Psalms 36.5-11	'With you is the well of life ...'
Hebrews 9.11-15	Christ the mediator of a new covenant
John 12.1-11	Mary anoints Jesus' feet

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Mary anoints Jesus' feet

¹Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), ⁵said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' ⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

⁹When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

John 12.1-11 NRSV¹

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Comments and Questions

In chapter 11 we see that the Jewish leaders are plotting to get rid of Jesus. John tells us then that 'Jesus no longer went about openly' (11.54). As we come to chapter 12 we can imagine that Jesus needs some extra support, and he goes to Bethany, where his friend Lazarus comes from. The dinner served there by Martha, though, far from being a source of support leads to a very tense situation as Judas complains about the waste of expensive perfume by Mary. To Mary it had been an act of devotion, as she lavished her attention on Jesus. Why would anyone complain? It is an act of extravagance, yes, but an act of extravagant love. Perhaps Jesus was really envious of the attention Jesus was getting. The story makes us think about the value of things – what to someone should be poured out, to another should be preserved. Are you one for pouring out or for preservation?

What Jesus says about the situation points to the future: 'Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial' (12.7). This is at the forefront of Jesus' mind, whereas the others seem more concerned to argue about the value and the waste. What Judas says can be dressed up as prudence, but it is still mean-minded. As disciples of Jesus we need to give him everything, and not hold anything back.

Quotations

1

The Cross is not simply a lovely example of sacrificial love. Throwing your life away needlessly is not admirable — it is wrong. Jesus' death was only a good example if it was more than an example, if it was something absolutely necessary to rescue us. And it was. Why did Jesus have to die in order to forgive us? There was a debt to be paid — God himself paid it. There was a penalty to be born — God himself bore it. Forgiveness is always a form of costly suffering.

Timothy J. Keller, 1950–

2

So the divine love is sacrificial love. Love does not mean to have and to own and to possess. It means to be had and to be owned and to be

possessed. It is not a circle circumscribed by self, it is arms outstretched to embrace all humanity within its grasp.

Fulton J. Sheen, 1895–1979

3

To be a mother is a great treasure. Mothers, in their unconditional and sacrificial love for their children, are the antidote to individualism; they are the greatest enemies against war.

Pope Francis, 1936–

Related topics

For further study:

Suffering; paschal mystery; service

Closing Prayer

God, our hope,
look upon us in your compassion,
for we grow faint through human weakness.
Make us draw new breath
by the suffering and victory
of your Only-Begotten Son,
who is alive, now and for ever.

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² *Celebrating the Christian Year* / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – vol. 2. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2005.