

## 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.

*Celebrating the Christian Year, Holy Week, Monday<sup>2</sup>*

## 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*

<sup>1</sup>Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup>There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. <sup>3</sup>Mary 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. <sup>4</sup>But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), <sup>5</sup>said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' <sup>6</sup>(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.) <sup>7</sup>Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup>You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

<sup>9</sup>When 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. <sup>10</sup>So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, <sup>11</sup>since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

John 12.1-11 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.*

<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

## Comments and Questions

In John's account of the final episodes in the ministry of Jesus, the events are placed more according to the significance of their place in the story than by their chronological sequence.

The Passover feast is announced (11.55), and then, six days before the Passover, Jesus returns to Bethany, the village of Lazarus (2.1), shares a meal with the family of Lazarus (12.2a), with Martha taking the role of a servant (12.2b), and Mary anoints Jesus (12.3), an action that has already been mentioned in 11.2. There is a sense of great affection, accentuated by the scent of the perfume (12.3b), produced by Mary's action.

However, the theme of Jesus' passion returns with the mention of Judas, whom the reader already knows to be the betrayer (cf. 6.60, 71). Judas objects to what he calls wasteful expenditure (12.5). The mention again of Judas as betrayer (12.4) shows that his motivation isn't really social concern. He is a thief and has stolen from the money box he was meant to look after (12.6). We can see the contrast between Mary's generosity and Judas' hypocritical self-interest. The question is posed: has Mary or Judas understood the significance of Jesus? Jesus answers the question himself (12.7). Jesus' presence at the meal with Lazarus' family is a day of preparation for his burial. Mary's action is a symbolic part of this preparation, symbolically embalming him.

There will always be poor people in human society (cf. Deuteronomy 15.11). However, the incarnation of the *logos* (1.14; 3.16) has cut across this for a brief time. Mary's gesture asserts this and anticipates the glorification of the Son.

As Jesus prepares to enter Jerusalem, John notes the opposition of the chief priests, who resent the fact that Jesus is acquiring followers because of the raising of Lazarus, and decide they want to get rid of both of them.

## Quotations

1

Judgement and weariness are foes to service and generosity.

Mary Anne Radmacher, 1957–

2

The cross is the assurance that effective prophetic criticism is done not by an outsider but always by one who must embrace the grief, enter into the death, and know the pain of the criticised one.

*The prophetic imagination* / Walter Brueggemann. 1978

3

Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all the souls you can, in every place you can, at all the times you can, with all the zeal you can, as long as ever you can.

John Wesley, 1703–1791

4

Jesus doesn't say, "The religion founded in my name is the way, the truth, and the life, [and] what people say about me is the way." "Our way of worship, the Christian structure, is not the way," [he would say,] "I am. I am. If you want to know what life is all about, what it's supposed to be, where it's supposed to go, where it's supposed to derive its strength from, don't look at anything people say about me. Don't look at the faith that's been created. Look at my life, which is a life ultimately of sacrificial love."

Frederick Buechner, 1926–

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Generosity; incarnation; suffering;