

Monday of Holy Week

Gospel text (Jn 12:1-11): Six days before Passover Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there, and Martha served, while Lazarus was one of those reclining at table with him. Mary took a liter of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair; the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then Judas the Iscariot, one of his disciples, and the one who would betray him, said, “Why was this oil not sold for three hundred days’ wages and given to the poor?” He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief and held the money bag and used to steal the contributions. So Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Let her keep this for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

The large crowd of the Jews found out that he was there and came, not only because of him, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. And the chief priests plotted to kill Lazarus too, because many of the Jews were turning away and believing in Jesus because of him.

“Anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair”

Fr. Jordi POU i Sabater
(Sant Jordi Desvalls, Girona, Spain)

Today, the Gospel summarizes two different attitudes about dealing with God, Jesus-Christ and life itself. We see the attitude of Judas criticizing Mary for anointing Jesus' feet: “Then Judas the Iscariot, one of his disciples, and the one who would

betray him, said, “Why was this oil not sold for three hundred days’ wages and given to the poor?” (Jn 12:4-5). What Judas said makes sense as it ties in with Jesus’ doctrine; but it is easy to criticize what others do, even when there are no hidden intentions, as it was with Judas’ case.

Any complaint must be an act of responsibility: if we complain we have to ask ourselves how we would have handled the situation and what we would be willing to do if we were in that position. Otherwise, we run the risk of unjustly criticizing someone for doing the best they can, according to the circumstances.

On the other hand, Mary anoints Jesus’ feet and wipes them with her hair, because she truly believes this is what she must do. This is an act of great benevolence toward Jesus: “Mary took a liter of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic nard” (Jn 12:3). It is an act of love, and like any act of love, it is difficult to understand by those who do not share it. I think that, at that very moment, Mary realized what St. Augustine wrote centuries later: “Perhaps on this earth the Lord’s feet are still in need. For of whom but of His members is He yet to say in the end, “Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of mine, ye did it unto me”? Ye spent what was superfluous for yourselves, but ye have done what was grateful to my feet.”

Judas’ complaint has no utility whatsoever, and it only led him to treachery. Mary’s act, on the other hand, led her to love her Lord even more and, as a consequence, to a greater love for all the “feet” of Christ in the world today.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“¡Oh most precious gift of the cross! What a most splendid sight to behold! The cross does not contain, like the tree of paradise does, good and evil intermingled. It is a tree that engenders life, without causing death; which introduces us into paradise, without casting out anyone.”
(Saint Theodore the Studite)

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“Love does not calculate, does not measure, does not worry about expense, does not set up barriers but can give joyfully; it seeks only the good of the other, surmounts meanness, pettiness, resentment and the narrow-mindedness that human beings sometimes harbor in their hearts.”

(Benedict XVI)

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“Jesus makes these words his own: ‘The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me’ (Jn 12:8). In so doing he does not soften the vehemence of former oracles against ‘buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals...’ (Am 8:6), but invites us to recognize his own presence in the poor who are his brethren.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, N° 2449)