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
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Today, in the Gospel, we are presented with two attitudes toward God, toward Jesus Christ, and toward life itself. At the anointing that Mary offers to her Lord, Judas protests: “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 he says is not absurd; it was consistent with the teaching of Jesus. Yet it is very easy to protest against what others do, even when there are no ulterior motives as in the case of Judas.

Every protest ought to be an act of responsibility: when we protest, we must ask ourselves how we would do it, what we ourselves are willing to do. Otherwise, protest can become—like in this case—nothing more than the complaint of those who act wrongly in the face of those who are trying to do things as well as they can.

Mary anoints the feet of Jesus and dries them with her hair because she believes it is what she must do. It is an action marked by splendid magnanimity: she did it taking “a liter of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic nard” (Jn 12:3). It is an act of love, and like every act of love, it is difficult to understand for those who do not share it. I believe that from that moment on, Mary understood what Saint Augustine would write 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’ protest has no usefulness; it only leads him to betrayal. Mary’s action leads her to love her Lord more and, as a consequence, to love more the “feet” of Christ that are present in this world.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “¡Oh most precious gift of the cross! What a most splendorous 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)

- “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)

- “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, Nº 2449)