

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

¹ *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

This is one of a series of stories in which the death of Jesus is the dominant theme. Six days before the celebration of the Passover, Jesus has returned to Bethany, the village of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Martha, who had previously been the leading figure in the narrative, adopts the role of the servant. Her earlier arrogance (cf. 11.21-24, 27, 39) has been transformed. Lazarus is also there, whom Jesus has raised from the dead. But the focus is now on Mary, who anoints Jesus' feet. The choice of feet is strange as such an anointing is neither a royal anointing nor the welcoming of an honoured guest. In 11.39 Martha had objected to the likely stench coming from the grave, but Mary's loving gesture fills the house with fragrance. Mary's loving action is anticipated in her response to Jesus in 11.28-32. A contrast comes with the appearance of Judas, who objects to the wasteful use of expensive ointment. But mention of the theme of betrayal (12.4) shows that social concern is not his motivation. He had no concern for the poor, but is a thief and has taken money from the money box he was supposed to be looking after. So, Mary's abundant generosity is contrasted with the self-interest of Judas. Has the woman or the disciple rightly understood the significance of Jesus? Jesus' response to Judas shows that Mary has understood the significance of his death. Mary has performed a symbolic embalming of the body of Jesus for burial, as though he were already dead. The symbolic action of Mary points to a positive interpretation of what is to come. The scene is now set for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

Quotations

1

I have found the paradox, that if you love until it hurts, there can be no more hurt, only more love.

St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, 1910–1997

2

I want to suffer and even rejoice for love, for this is my way of scattering flowers. Never a flower shall I find but its petals shall be scattered for you; and all the while I will sing; yes, always sing, even when gathering roses in the midst of thorns; and the longer and sharper the thorns may be, the sweeter shall be my song!

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, 1873–1897

2

3

Let's think of that moment when a woman washed the feet of Jesus with the nard, so expensive: it is a religious moment, a moment of gratitude, a moment of love. And he [Judas] stands apart with bitter criticism: 'But this could have been used for the poor!' This is the first reference that I have found, in the Gospel, to poverty as an ideology. The ideologue does not know what love is, because he does not know how to give himself.

Encountering truth: meeting God in the everyday / Pope Francis. 2015

Related topics

For further study:

Suffering, paschal mystery

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, 2 · Monday of Holy Week²

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