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Monday's Gospel: The Heart's Fragrance

Gospel for Monday in Holy Week, and commentary.

Gospel (*Jn 12:1-11*)

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at table with him. Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment.

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. Jesus said, “Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

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

Commentary

Mary and Judas both sensed the same aroma: the “good aroma of Christ” (cf. *2 Cor* 2:15). But the fragrance that issued from each one’s heart was very different. And so their way of welcoming the gift of Jesus’ love was also very different.

Our Lord knows that his time on earth is coming to an end. He has come to love us “to the end” (cf. *Jn* 13:1), as Saint John will tell us in the chapter immediately after the one we are reading today. And therefore, because he has come to love, in this sublime moment his heart is especially sensitive to the signs of love that he receives.

Mary expresses her love without reserve. She isn't aware of everything that is going to happen in the next few days, everything that the Paschal Mystery will entail. But her feminine intuition tells her that

something important is about to take place.

Her love is shown without conditions, without haggling, without human calculations. She has received so much love from Jesus, and the only thing that matters to her is trying to imitate his way of loving by giving everything she has: her best perfume, her comely hair. Because feminine beauty can also be – should be – a tribute to God.

Judas has also has received so much love from Jesus. But his heart has been gradually closing itself to that source of light and warmth. And now his soul is dark and cold. Hence neither the finest of fragrances nor our Lord's warmest smile can make him react. His senses are so distorted, his life is so confused, that he will end up agreeing to sell Jesus for thirty coins, when, as he himself

says, the perfume alone was worth three hundred denarii.

Fully immersed in Holy Week, we can approach the Easter Mystery, now imminent, by considering our own lives in the light of the two people the Church presents to us today. Like them, we too have received so much love from Jesus. With sincerity, with courage, let us ask ourselves if we are really giving back everything we have to our Lord: soul, body, time and heart. Only by breaking the vessel, without holding anything back, can we cry out with Saint Paul: “Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere” (2 Cor 2:14).

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