

Meditations: Monday of Holy Week

Reflections for Monday of Holy Week. The topics are: Mary of Bethany gives Jesus her most precious possession; our deeds can bring Christ's "good aroma" to the world; caring for Jesus in the Tabernacle.

“SIX DAYS BEFORE the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.” Jesus felt at home there among his friends, surrounded by their affection. He has often been in Bethany, but this is a more solemn moment. He is going to Jerusalem, where he knows the Cross is waiting

for him. “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” (*Jn* 12:1-3).

Everyone knew that the religious authorities were seeking to do away with Jesus. Mary’s love enables her to sense what is to befall Jesus. So she wants to do something special for her Lord, to show her love for him. She takes her most valuable possession, expensive perfume of pure nard, and pours it over Jesus’ feet. She breaks the jar, giving everything to her Lord and God.

Some of those present angrily point to the futility of this gesture. We know that Judas Iscariot also took part in this criticism, not because he

wanted that expensive item to be put to better use, but perhaps because it clashed with his own lifestyle. Mary, however, is silent. She gives no heed to the comments her gesture has provoked. Her only concern is to make our Lord feel at home, and therefore Jesus speaks out in her defense.

“Mary offers Jesus the most precious thing she has and with a gesture of deep devotion. 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.”[1]

WHOEVER GIVES EVERYTHING to God becomes a gift for others as well. On the contrary, whoever calculates carefully when faced with Christ's

call, ends up haggling with others as well. When we truly say ‘yes’ to our Lord, we bring to others “the good aroma of Christ” (cf. *2 Cor* 2:15). As happened in Bethany, we could say that “the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment” (*Jn* 12:3). Hence our life too, guided by God’s strength, can fill the world with Christ’s fragrance. We ask Martha, Mary and Lazarus, whose memorial Pope Francis has wanted the Church to celebrate every 29th of July, to help us fill our life and that of our families and friends with the fragrance their own home had.

Today in Bethany Christ’s death is also announced, when he speaks about “the day of my burial” (*Jn* 12:8). But his death will give rise to an abundant torrent of Life – clear and radiant – for all men and women! Jesus asks us to accompany him closely, since “if our will is not ready to die in accord with the

Passion of Christ, neither will Christ's life be in us.”[2] But we must not wait for extraordinary occasions to show Jesus our love. Each of our days is a new opportunity to serve him, to offer him our life and employ it generously in his service, following faithfully in his footsteps.

What we have in our hands will almost always be little things, but things a small child can offer with love: “Sometimes we feel inclined to act as little children. What we do then has a wonderful value in God's eyes and, so long as we don't let routine creep in, our 'little' actions will indeed be fruitful with the unfailing fruitfulness of Love.”[3]

“WHAT JOY to contemplate Jesus in Bethany! A friend of Lazarus, Martha and Mary! He goes there to recover his strength when he is tired. Jesus has his home there. There are souls there who appreciate him. There are

also souls who come close the Tabernacle and, for them, that is Bethany. I hope it is for you too! Bethany is trust, the warmth of a home, intimacy. Beloved friends of Jesus.”[4] We want the Tabernacle closest to us to be a place where Jesus feels as much at home as in Bethany. We want to adorn it with the fragrance of our struggle, so often more a matter of wishes than results.

Martha has a very discreet role in the scene we contemplate on this Monday of Holy Week. She prepares the dinner during which Mary will anoint the feet of Jesus. With the affection of a sister and mother she serves her guests. The house would also have been filled with the aroma of that dinner prepared with great love; perhaps she prepared what her Friend especially liked. In these moments, nearing his death, Jesus is comforted by any small sign of affection. Our work, our smile, our

charity for those close to us, are the details he appreciates.

As one more proof of God's infinite Love, our Lord has really stayed in the Tabernacle to be near us. If Mary's love and faith prompted her to show such refined affection for our Lord by anointing his feet in Bethany, love and faith can also lead us to have greater devotion to Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist. Mary doesn't think she is doing anything extraordinary by anointing our Lord's feet with that precious perfume. She acts with the spontaneity of love. Only Christ knows that, in a few days time, he will wash the feet of his apostles. Mary has anticipated this with her gesture. Our Lord, who is grateful for any sign of affection, no matter how small, appreciates her feminine intuition.

Perhaps our Lady too witnessed this endearing moment. What a comfort it would be for her, as her Son's hour was drawing near, to see how Jesus felt loved in this home.

(Image: "Christ in the Home of Martha and Mary," Velazquez. Wiki Commons)

[1] Benedict XVI, Homily, 29 March 2010.

[2] Saint Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistola ad Magnesios* 5, 1.

[3] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 859.

[4] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, 6 November 1940. Cf. *The Way, Critical-Historical Edition*, commentary on no. 322.

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