

“Humility, Devotion, and Faithfulness” John 12:1-11 Holy Monday 2021

Grace, peace and mercy be unto you from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, today we take a liturgical step back in time, as the gospel takes us to the day before Palm Sunday. In the time leading up to this gospel, Jesus had been in hiding. He was keeping a low profile because the chief priests and Pharisees were plotting to take his life. They want him gone, because he raised Lazarus from the dead. Out of the picture, because he had gained a large following. Dead, because he's become a threat to their monopoly on the religious life of the people of God.

So, John tells us: (11:54)

Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.

Today, in the Gospel, Jesus comes out of hiding, and the first place he goes is back to the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus. The scene of his latest and greatest miracle - the raising of Lazarus. While there, they have supper together. Martha serves, and Lazarus visits with Jesus. And after supper, John tells us (12:3)

Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Mary takes her best perfume and pours it on Jesus' feet. She unbinds her long hair and uses it to work the ointment into Jesus' heels and toes and all over his feet. And then, with her own hair she wipes his feet dry. Her actions are the picture of humility. The epitome of devotion. The very definition of faithfulness at work in loving service.

Judas, who will later betray Jesus, is offended by Mary's devotion. He doesn't like her use of such fine perfume for the anointing of Jesus' feet...and in the words of those who so often misunderstand the mission of Christ, the work of the Church, and the needs and circumstances of the poor, he says: (John 12.15-16)

“Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” 6 He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.

Judas—the thief—rejects Mary's humility, devotion, and faithfulness to her Lord. He rejects her anointing of Jesus as an improper use of something valuable and beautiful. But Jesus' welcomes Mary's kindness. Jesus receives her anointing with thankfulness and approval. And by his reception of her faithful, humble devotion, Jesus reveals just what it is that Mary has done. John says, (12.7)

Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial.

By her act of faithfulness to Christ, Mary has set the stage for the passion and crucifixion of our Lord. By anointing Jesus' feet, Mary proclaims his death. By covering his feet with her hair, Mary prepares Jesus for his burial in the tomb. By doing it all while Jesus is still alive, Mary professes her heartfelt gratitude for Christ's sacrifice for his suffering for his

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death in her place. And most importantly, by anointing Jesus for burial while he is yet alive, Mary confesses her faith in his coming resurrection.

From this point on, every step Jesus takes will bring him one step closer to the cross. As we journey through these holy days and make our way toward Good Friday, Mary serves as an example for us. She is an example of devotion to Christ, humility before men, and faithfulness to God. We cannot anoint Jesus’ feet with expensive oil or fancy perfume; We cannot wipe his feet with our hair. But we can join with Mary in devotion, humility, and faithfulness to our Lord.

In our devotion these holy days, let us fix our eyes on Jesus and upon his cross, for which Mary so lovingly prepared him by anointing his feet. In our humility, let us put away our pride and cling to Christ, even as he is humiliated by being nailed naked to the cross. In our faithfulness, let us imitate Mary—not by preparing Christ for his death and burial—but by preparing ourselves through contrition, repentance, and solemnity; that we may mark Christ’s death in true heartfelt devotion, humility, and grateful faith that sees in Christ’s suffering and dying our very own forgiveness and salvation and in his rising, our everlasting life.

Amen.