

Holy Monday 2020 Reflection

John 12:1-8

Jesus anointed at Bethany

Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. ³ Mary therefore took a pound^[a] 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. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii^[b] 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. ⁷ Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it^[c] for the day of my burial. ⁸ For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

Reflection:

“How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

Holy Week begins as it ends with extravagance and intimacy.

Mary’s Extravagance offends Judas Iscariot. The expensive ointment could have been sold to feed the poor.

Extravagance such as Mary’s is only offensive however to those who know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

The coronavirus lockdown is teaching us many things and one of those is to rethink the old relationships between cost and value.

What price, for example, would you put on your health right now?
How much would you pay to see your grand-children or grandparents and hold them in your arms?
How offensive do you find the comments of some politicians who try to measure the cost to the economy against the death rate?

Mary wasn’t thinking about the cost of the perfume, she was thinking about the value of having her Lord, the one who had raised her brother to life, at her table.
Against the extravagance of God’s grace, what is one jar of perfume?

We’ll meet such extravagance again on Friday at the foot of the Cross when Jesus pours out the high cost of his life, gladly because he beholds the value of forging a new covenant of love between God and humanity.

Mary's intimacy with Jesus is equally shocking – scandalous even.
A woman stroking this man's feet with her hair.

Perhaps we prefer our religion at a bit more of a distance.
Maybe we prefer our God at a bit of a distance too.

But here we have skin on skin, hair and feet and dandruff and toenails and the mingled smells of perfume and tears and sweat.

But that's what happens when you love.
Is it not true that the hardest part of this lockdown has been the absence of human touch – particularly the absence of being able to touch the humans you love.

Do you ache for such intimacy with those you love and cannot be near?

Then you will understand something of the heart of God, because we will encounter this intimacy again at the end of the week in the mingling of tears and sweat and blood as God, in Christ on the Cross, does what is needed because he aches to be close to us.

The feet so extravagantly and intimately anointed on Monday are extravagantly and intimately pierced on Friday.

Indeed,
How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

Prayer:
God of love, my prayer is simple,

You love with an extravagant love,
Help me to love without checking the cost.
As you emptied yourself in love for me,
Teach me to hold nothing back,
But to give my whole heart in love for you and my neighbour.

You love with an intimate love,
Help me to be more vulnerable in sharing my love.
As you drew near to me on the Cross,
Teach me to open my heart also,
To let you and others in.
Amen