

Entering the Home of Martha Mary Lazarus

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Hello, I'm Father Daniel Scheidt, and we're going to be going to Bethany to the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. The gospel for the Monday of Holy Week is from the 12th chapter of John, verses one to eight. Let us pray.

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, so many times you wished to abide at the home of your friends, Martha and Mary and Lazarus. We ask you to invite us into their home that we might see what they see, that we might be part of the miracle of your love, that our preparations for Holy Week are entering your passion, death, and resurrection, would have the fragrance of what was poured out at that banquet. We ask all of this in your Holy Name, Jesus the Christ, Jesus, the Anointed One. You who are Lord, forever and ever. Amen.

John 12

Perhaps we can begin simply by reading this passage from the 12th chapter of John.

"Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there, and Martha served while Lazarus was one of those reclining at table with him. Mary took a liter of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair.

The house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then Judas, the Iscariot, one of the disciples, and the one who would betray him, said, 'Why was the oil not sold for 300 days' wages and given to the poor?' He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief and held the money bag and used to steal the contributions. So Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. Let her keep this for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'"

We can marvel at the astonished, grateful wonder of Martha and Mary as they see their brother reclining at table. He's horizontal and alive, and the last time they saw him, he was horizontal and dead. It was a corpse placed in a tomb. And the very one who raised him, who said, "Come out," is the one who has come into their home like he did so many times before to be with them. And that leader of aromatic spikenard, that enormous quantity of aromatic oil rather than being used to embalm a corpse is now poured out in love unto Jesus.

As a recognition, fundamentally, that Jesus is the Anointed One. He is the Christ, he is the King of Israel. But Mary's gesture is more than a simple acknowledgement that the Messiah

has come, for as vitally important and transformative as that is. She's also giving a prophetic indication of his upcoming passion. There are people who will look at this gesture, people like Judas, and not understand it. And yet Jesus allows it, and indeed approves it.

Song of Songs

In a mysterious way, Mary brings to fulfillment a mysterious passage from the Song of Songs, the love poem at the heart of the Jewish Old Testament. In chapter seven verse five of the Song of Songs, otherwise known as the Canticle of Canticles, we hear,

"Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel, and the flowing locks of your head are like purple threads. The king is held captive in your tresses."

The gesture of Mary anointing Jesus and wiping his feet with her hair, that prophetic gesture is acknowledging that He is the Divine Bridegroom. And Mary here becomes the bride, the cherished soul. She becomes the representative of every disciple that Jesus loves.

This gesture is also vitally important for the future days of Jesus's remaining earthly ministry. Judas's words and his actions actually stink. They are putrifying, because to call into question a gift, and have it turned into a transaction, and to encourage the giving to the moneybag for the poor, and to be stealing from it at the same time, this filthy, awful gesture needs an antidote to overwhelm it by a fragrance infinitely more beautiful. And this is Mary's gesture.

The Aroma of Christ

That aromatic spikenard is found to this day in only one part of the world, in the Himalayan mountains. It's produced by a particular flower. It's relatively rare, and very time-consuming to make. And so to have that enormous quantity of it is very significant. It's the type of quantity that would be considered, for example, a dowry for a bride getting married. It's concentrated wealth in the deepest sense of that word. And let's just say a little goes a long way. What that aromatic spikenard marks will be marked for days and days and days. St. John says significantly that the whole house is filled with the fragrance.

And so our meditation is on how this fragrance remains on the body of Jesus, not just at the banquet, but also into His suffering, His death, His time in the tomb, even unto the Resurrection. We can even ask, Mary wants to smell like Jesus. You want to be indelibly marked by him and giving the gift away it remains yours. And even if Peter would've denied you in front of the charcoal fire, denied knowing you, Lord Jesus. Mary, you want everybody to know who you belong to. Mary, everyone who will encounter you at every step of the way of Jesus's suffering, they will smell that you belong to Him and they will smell in Him that He belongs to you.

And we can ponder the fact that this anointing of love being marked by love, will make sure that Judas smells love when he kisses Jesus on the cheek. The soldiers will smell love when they blindfold Jesus and slap him and beat him and crown him with thorns. Pontius Pilate will smell love when he condemns Jesus to death.

Jesus's prison cell will smell with this aromatic fragrance like the house of Bethany smelled those days earlier. As Jesus is starving, he will recall the banquet of his friends. The crowds on the way to Calvary will smell the fragrance of love as Christ passes and Simon of Cyrene will trail Jesus's fragrance. The perfume of love will be stronger than Jesus's sweat and his blood, the filth and the spittle, the fatigue and the fear. Jesus's prayer to our Father on the cross will already be a fragrant offering. And Mother Mary, Our Lady, will be consoled that her son remains the anointed one, like the sachet of myrrh between the breasts described in the Song of Songs.

The repentant thief will smell the fragrance of paradise. When Jesus says, "Today you will be with me there." And as Jesus's dead body, his holy corpse, is prepared for burial, he will already be pre-anointed with love, and the stench of death will have no place in him.

That song, "Crown Him with Many Crowns," has the verse of fair flowers, of paradise extending their fragrance ever sweet. And the gesture that Mary of Bethany gives to Jesus on one side of the passion comes to meet him on the morning of the Resurrection. When Mary comes to the tomb with the other myrrh bearers to anoint the body again, they don't need to use that oil either, just like they didn't need to use the remainder on Lazarus.

Instead, the Gardener of every beautiful fragrance risen and alive gives his friends the gift of Heaven. Saint Paul will pray those mysterious words that speak of our identity as followers of the Anointed One. In his second letter to the Corinthians in the second chapter, St. Paul says, *"We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one, a fragrance from death to death, to the other, a fragrance from life to life."* And so we pray.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for marking us indelibly with the fragrance of your divine love. Thank you for marking us in the sacred prism of our baptism and of our confirmation as belonging to you irrevocably. The membership of our baptism, the mission of our confirmation.

We ask that our lives would bury your fragrance wherever we go, that when people encounter us, they would sense your nearness. We ask that you would anoint our mission again and again with a fresh outpouring of your Holy Spirit so that we might bring your love to new places and to new people that they too might be marked by love, marked as belonging to you. We ask this in your name. Amen.