

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord"

Reading 1: Is 50: 4 – 7
 Reading 2: Phil 2: 6 – 11

Responsorial Psalms: Ps 21:8-9,17-18,23-24
 Gospel Reading : Mk 14: 1 – 15,47

Gospel Reading Mark 14: 1-15, 47

It was now two days before the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth, and kill him; for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be a tumult of the people." And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. But there were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment thus wasted? For this ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they reproached her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them; but you will not always have me. 8 She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burying. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her." Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him. And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the passover?" And he sent two of his disciples, and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the householder, 'The Teacher says, where is my guest room, where I am to eat the passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.

Meditation:

The Feast of Passover was a time of great anticipation for the Jews. Emotions ran high as people recalled the history of their ancestors' deliverance from slavery in Egypt. For weeks leading up to the feast intense preparations were made. The Romans sent extra forces to Jerusalem to deal with potential disturbances and uprisings. It was Jewish belief that the Messiah would come at Passover to deliver his people from oppression. Jesus' enemies were expecting him to make his appearance in Jerusalem and they were hoping to arrest him before he had the chance to incite the crowds to make him their Messiah and King.

As Jesus makes his way towards Jerusalem for what he knows will be his last Passover with his disciples, he stops in the village of Bethany where he is invited to dinner by a well-to-do host named Simon. Matthew (26:6-13) and John (12:1-8) recount this story as well and Luke tells us that Simon was a Pharisee. In Luke's account (7:36-50) we are told that Simon did not treat Jesus with the normal courtesy given to guests, such as washing their feet and anointing their head before they reclined at table. Why did Simon invite him to dinner and then neglect to give him the customary signs of respect and honour? Simon was very likely a collector of celebrities. He patronized Jesus because of his popularity with the crowds.

When a woman interrupts the meal to anoint Jesus's feet, she causes a scene and provokes Simon's company to criticize her action. Why did this woman approach Jesus and anoint him at the risk of ridicule and abuse by others? Her action was motivated by one thing, and one thing only, namely, her love for Jesus. She was oblivious to all around her, except for Jesus. She also did something which only love can do. She took the most precious thing she had and spent it all on Jesus. She didn't just pour a few drops of ointment on Jesus. She poured out all the contents! Her love was not calculated but extravagant. The perfume she anointed Jesus with was a very precious ointment made from a rare plant in faraway India. This ointment was often used for anointing the body at burial. It was very expensive, almost a year's wages for an ordinary worker. In a spirit of gratitude and with intense love, this woman lavishly served the one who showed her the mercy and kindness of God. John's Gospel tells us that this woman was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, close friends of Jesus. Since Jesus was passing through her neighbourhood she lost no time to show him a spontaneous act of love and gratitude.

Why did Simon's company view this woman's act as extravagant wastefulness? They were greedy. A person views things according to what is inside the heart or soul. Jesus remarked that this woman had done a lovely deed. We can never outmatch God in kindness and generosity. The greatest proof of his love for us is the willing offer of his only begotten Son who poured out his blood upon the cross for our sins. Are you ready to pour out your love upon the One who gave himself without reserve for your sake?

Mark immediately contrasts this lovely deed with the treacherous act of Judas. Why did Judas betray his own Master? Was his treachery motivated by greed, bitter disappointment with Jesus or hatred because of disillusionment? It may be that Judas never intended for his Master to die. Maybe he thought Jesus was proceeding too slowly and not acting aggressively enough in setting up his messianic kingdom. Perhaps Judas wanted to force Jesus' hand by compelling him to act. Nonetheless, his tragedy was his refusal to accept Jesus as he was. Aren't we tempted to use God for our own purposes? It is not God who must change, but we must be changed by him. Jesus knew beforehand what would befall him. Just as God can use any individual as his instrument, so can Satan, his arch-enemy and our adversary. We can either be an instrument of good or of evil, and a servant of God or of Satan. The choice is ours. Do you allow greed or selfishness or the extravagant love and mercy of God to rule in your heart and actions?

Questions for Community Faith Sharing:

1. The reading of the Passion can be a powerful experience if we allow it to touch us. Take a moment today to really enter into his journey with Jesus. Identify who do you relate with in this story and why. What role do you play in this drama of love?
2. On Palm Sunday, Christ is proclaimed King of Israel. A few days later, he is condemned to death by the same crowd. Nevertheless, Jesus ends his life forgiving all who have hurt him. How am I called to grow in this area?

"Lord, your grace is sufficient for me. Fill my heart with love and gratitude for the mercy you have shown to me and give me freedom and joy to love and serve others as you have taught."