

29th March 2021 Monday in Holy Week

1st Reading: Isaiah 42:1-7 Gospel: John 12:1-11

Today's readings in this most holy of weeks in the liturgical year give us an insight into the love that is at the centre of all that we will celebrate this week. The first reading is one of the four songs of the suffering servant in Isaiah; mysterious songs about one who suffers in His service of the Lord. These songs are completely fulfilled in Our Lord Jesus Christ's work of our salvation on the Cross. It was because of and out of His love for us that He suffered such a brutal and shameful death. We frequently refer to Christ's "Passion and death" and it's worth noting that the word "passion" comes from "passive". A careful reading of the Gospels will see that up until Jesus leads His disciples out of the upper room and into the garden of Gethsemane, He is in control. But now He allows others to control Him. He is taken and led to where others want Him to be, not as we know from His anguished prayer, where He wants to be. But love is at the heart of it all. His complete and perfect love for us is fully revealed on the Cross.

Love is at the heart of Mary's generous act of anointing Jesus' feet. Mary, you may recall, is the one who had sat at Jesus' feet and drunk in every word that He was saying (Lk. 10:38-42), whilst her sister Martha had busied herself doing the chores. Jesus had said on that occasion that Mary had chosen the better part (c.f. Lk. 10:42), which was to spend time listening to Jesus. *Lectio divina* (holy reading) is a way of reading Sacred Scriptures, where we read a passage several times, reflecting on what the Lord is saying to us. When reading we can be struck by a word or a phrase and the amazing thing is, that however familiar we are with some passages, because they are the inspired word of God, the Holy Spirit gives us new and deeper insights into familiar passages. Each new insight leads us to respond to Jesus with a new and deeper expression of our love for Him. This might be carried out through a practical action of service to another person, or it may be a deeper and more personal experience of Jesus' presence in our lives.

We could perhaps suggest that Mary is the patron of *lectio divina*. Having listened to Jesus beforehand, her heart must have been deeply moved and now, prompted by the Spirit she did an amazing thing. As she poured the ointment, the scent filled the whole house as a sign of the love that was poured out at that moment. How can we respond to Jesus' love for us this week?

Postscript: Both times Mary's response to Jesus is challenged: first her own sister accuses her of not helping her and in the Gospel today, she is accused of wasting money which could be used for the poor. It is not unusual for us to find that our love for Jesus is challenged by other people, even by our nearest and dearest. Rest assured that Jesus knows and by His grace we can stay faithful to Him.