



Service for Week 31st March-
6th April 2025 5th Sunday in
Lent. By Chaplain Andy
Our Opening Prayer

Loving God, help us to understand what it really means to see each part of each day as an opportunity to work for you. Teach us to do everything in such a way that your Spirit is unmistakably at work and your love clear to all, in Jesus' name.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in
heaven,.....

Amen

Bible Reading John 12: 1-8

Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him.

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages."

He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

The account of Jesus' feet being washed by a woman we can read in Matthew, Mark and John's gospel and they all differ in detail. In Matthew, it says it was the disciples who objected to the woman's actions. In Luke's account the woman is unnamed but says she was a 'sinner' and it is so different there is some doubt that it is describing the same incident.

But despite their differences all the gospel accounts are recording the occasion when Jesus was anointed -that is had oil poured on his head (in Mark) and had his feet washed with oil (in Matthew, Luke and John) Anointing is a ritual tradition in the bible involving fragrant plants and spices to make a rich oil used to pour over the head or other parts of the body. Our reading mentions Nard which was a very expensive, fragrant oil



derived from the spikenard plant imported from India and China. In biblical times, it was the custom to anoint the dead with perfumes and spices as part of preparing the body for burial so these accounts of Jesus being anointed in the gospels meant that he was in effect anointed prior to his death on the cross in Jerusalem. The anointing also signified that Jesus was set apart, he was of God- the Messiah, which would have been Mary's realisation and motivation for doing what she did. Kings were also anointed, just as they are today – our king Charles III was anointed at his coronation in 2023.

At that time women would not normally be admitted to where the men were eating and respectable women would not untie their hair in public. Mary was criticised for using such a lot of very expensive oil but Jesus says "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." Jesus is not denigrating the needs of the poor but emphasising that the woman in her extravagant gesture gave all she had in faith, service and gratitude to Jesus.

I have just returned from visiting Rome and St. Peter's Basilica which

is probably the most extravagant church in the world. It was built in the 16th century when 50-60% of people would be classed as poor. You could say that the money used to construct St Peter's or indeed St Paul's cathedral in London could have been used in a very different way but these great churches have stood for hundreds of years in honour, service and to reflect the fact that Jesus Christ was of God. Through the extreme skill and artistry of the builders a sense of that which is beyond us is captured in these, in other places of worship and at other sites across the world.

But the presence of God can also be felt in the ordinary things of life. John's gospel describes how it was during a meal at home in their house that Mary went against convention and put her heart into an extravagant gesture because of her belief and love of Jesus. As we think about our own faith during this time of Lent, have we the same burning conviction and dedication to God in our lives?

Amen.

Closing Prayer

Loving Jesus, help me to know you better and to love you more deeply. May that in turn help me to show my love for you in action and demonstrate the sincerity of my faith.

Amen.

Prayers inspired by Prayerfully Yours by Nick Fawcett