

Reflection on John 12:1-8

The Gospel begins as Jesus arrives in Bethany. He has come to visit with Lazarus, Martha and Mary. They gathered around the table to catch up with Jesus. Martha spent most of the day preparing a special meal for Jesus.

While they were gathered at the table, Mary approached Jesus with a container of expensive perfumed oil. She began to cleanse his feet and then she anointed his feet with exotic and expensive oil.

Mary should not be washing Jesus' feet! This was a task for the slaves and servants, not for a member of the family. Mary not only washed Jesus' feet, she also had the audacity to dry his feet with her hair! What an intimate act! Many of the guests were shocked. What was Mary thinking? Her action was completely inappropriate. However, no one spoke a word.

After a few moments, Judas Iscariot finally asked why this expensive oil had not been sold and the money given to the poor. Judas sounded like a champion of the poor, however, he had hoped to sell the oil and then pocket the money himself. Judas was in charge of the money bag. Jesus knows that Judas is upset about the spending of the money (which he had planned to pocket). Judas was not concerned for the needs of the poor. He simply was concerned for himself.

Jesus defends Mary and her compassionate, loving action. Jesus knew that the coming days would be horrific for him. By washing his feet and anointing them, Mary had given him a great gift of love and care with this simple, loving action. Jesus confronts Judas and his hypocrisy. He emphatically tells Judas to leave Mary alone. She was to keep the oil for the day of Jesus' burial.

Jesus knew Judas' heart had changed. Yet, Jesus still loved Judas. And Jesus was deeply saddened that Judas was no longer committed to Jesus and to the people of God. Judas was committed only to himself. What a loss for Jesus and for Judas. Jesus had lost a loved one and a follower but Judas had betrayed himself and his best friend! And for what: a bag of coins?

Do we have a "Judas" in our lives: someone who had hurt or betrayed us? I assume most of us do. The question is: will we strive to follow in Jesus' footsteps? Are we open to forgiving the person who hurt or betrayed us? And if we cannot answer yes, are we willing to desire to forgive the other to Jesus? Jesus will grace us with the ability to forgive, if we open our hearts to him. All we have to do is ask!

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