

COLLECT: ALMIGHTY GOD, you alone can bring into order the unruly will and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE LESSONS; First Reading: Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126

Second Reading: Philippians 3:4b-14

Gospel: John 12:1-8

THE SERMON: After Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead the word, of this miracle, spread throughout the area and many began to believe in him. Some of the people who had witnessed the event went and told the religious authorities. The chief priest and the Pharisees had a meeting in which they asked, "What are we going to do about this man?"

They saw that Jesus was performing many signs/miracles and they believed that if they left him alone, the whole Jewish population would begin to follow him ending temple worship and their power in the nation. They also

believed the Roman authorities would no longer allow them to make rules, their own laws and govern their society.

They resolved Jesus must be killed for the good of the nation.

Once Jesus was told the religious authorities had intended to kill him, he no longer went freely about in Jerusalem. He and his disciples fled into the countryside for their safety.

Many people were coming into Jerusalem, from throughout the countryside, to purify themselves and get ready for Passover. Knowing that the religious authorities wanted to capture Jesus; people were wondering if Jesus would come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. It was known that the religious authorities had said that anyone who had information about Jesus should inform them. They even offered a reward to anyone who led to his capture. This is why, later, Judas Iscariot would be given the 30 pieces of silver.

Six days before Passover, Jesus is in Bethany, a town two miles from Jerusalem. He is a guest at the house of his friend Lazarus, Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, are having a dinner party for him. While Martha is preparing the meal, Mary is in the front of the house with the men. She is sitting at the feet of Jesus. and anointing his feet with some fragrant and expensive perfume. She is also wiping his feet with her hair.

Mary is defying custom; women aren't supposed to be in a room with males unless they are relatives. So, although Lazarus, her brother, is in the room, there are other men there who aren't her relatives. So custom demands that Mary shouldn't be there.

Yet, Mary defies custom to show her love for Jesus and to offer a thanksgiving to him for raising her brother from the dead. She gives Jesus the very best of what she has.

Are you like Mary? During this Lent did you commit something special, did you make a covenant, a sacred promise to God to change something in your life as a way of showing God how much you love him? Are you keeping this promise? What will you do to show your love after Lent?

While Mary was anointing Jesus' feet, his disciple Judas Iscariot looked on with disapproval, He knew that this perfume Mary was using was expensive. it cost at least 300 denarii. (During that time a normal worker would be paid one denarius for a day's work.)

Judas asked in a condescending tone, "Why doesn't she sell this oil and give the money to the poor?" What Judas really wanted was that the perfume be handed over to Jesus, who would then give it to him because he kept the money for Jesus and the disciples. He would sell the perfume, some of the money would be given to the poor, but some would end up in Judas' pocket because he was a thief.

Jesus rebuked Judas and told him to leave Mary alone. Jesus knew Mary had bought the perfume for the day of his approaching burial. He told Judas that the poor would always be there, but he wouldn't.

In six days, Judas would betray Jesus. He would collect 30 pieces of silver for leading the temple police to the place where Jesus was praying so that he would be taken.

Are you like Judas? Do you profess to love God? Do you behave as though you are a Christian, but have deceit in our heart? You may know and speak the 10 commandments, but do you honestly live them?

In Philippians, Paul states, I was born a Hebrew circumcised and named on the eighth day. I was a zealous member of the religious authorities; I was a Pharisee. I had authority to persecute the church, to destroy the followers of Jesus (People of the Way) after his death. However, in coming to know Christ I have suffered the loss of these things. Now I call them rubbish because I have found a love for Christ and I have a faith based on the righteousness of God.

Can you be like Paul, can you be a builder of the faith and a cheerleader for Christ? Have you ever had an encounter where the Holy Spirit just kept nudging you to do the right thing? Perhaps the Holy Spirit was/is preparing you for a meeting with Christ.

People of St. Matthew's: "The Lord has done great things for us and we are glad indeed." (Psalm 126 verse 4). Amen.

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