

Anointment

5th Thursday of Lent



While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, 'Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.' And they scolded her. But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'

Mark 14:3-9

You can understand the objection by some of those gathered in Simon's house. This was an extraordinarily costly ointment and the fact of the matter is that the money it cost could very well have been used for something far more useful in terms of the kingdom of God—food for the hungry, compassion for the needy. Jesus ordinarily would have shared their point of view, but to their surprise and to ours as well, I expect, he defended her.

His hour was close at hand and they, his disciples who had followed him most closely and had enjoyed the benefit of his daily teaching, still refused to see what he had been telling them ever since they left Caesarea Philippi and started the journey that had brought them to Jerusalem. Yet, this unnamed woman saw what they did not see and embraced what they would not embrace.

We too sometimes have the hardest time seeing the things that we do not want to see even though they may be abundantly clear to others, others perhaps who have stood on the periphery and watched and listened. There is a variety of reasons for us, but in this case what Jesus had been saying about his rejection by the religious leaders and his crucifixion simply did not fit with the disciples' view of things. It was not at all how it was supposed to be. She, whoever she was, understood, and did what she could do, and in doing so, I think, lessened a bit the isolation he felt with this burden.

Prayer

Lord, help me to live with my eyes wide-open and to do whatever it is that I can do for you. Amen.