



Sunday Reflection

Lent 5



in the Charges of St Margaret, Renfrew & St John,
Johnstone

For Sunday 29 March 2020 – Lent 5
while all Church worship is Suspended

The Gospel reading is printed on the pewsheet John 11.1-45

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." John 11:27

An Illustration to set the scene

Martha of Bethany, who stands at the centre of today's Gospel reading, is the patron saint of Tarascon in the south of France. Legend has it that she confronted and tamed a dragon that was terrorising the townspeople. The Tarasque, as the monster was called, is described as having a lion's head, six short legs, an ox-like body covered with a turtle shell, and a scaly tail that ended in a scorpion's sting. It must have been quite a sight to behold! Elsewhere it is reported as living where the Château Tarascon now stands, on a rock in the middle of the river. In this account it is described as "a dragon, half animal, half fish, thicker than an ox, longer than a horse, with teeth like swords and big as horns". This creature "hid in the river where he took the life of all passers-by and submerged vessels". The king had challenged the dragon but had not succeeded in killing it. When St Martha arrived she confronted the beast and tamed it with hymns and prayers, before leading it to the city. Sadly, the people were still terrified of it, and attacked and killed it. Martha then preached to

them and converted many of them to Christianity. In their remorse, the townspeople changed the town's name to Tarascon.

Looking at the Gospel teaching for today

Today's Gospel reading is long and powerful and brings us right into the heart of Passiontide at every level. There are many people and voices within it, and one who stands out from the crowd is Martha, a woman whom Jesus loved. She speaks here in the immediate moments after her beloved brother has died. She has longed for Jesus to come and make him well, but he hasn't. The worst has happened.

When Jesus does arrive, Martha opens her heart to him. She gives him both her grief and her faith. For Martha the two things do not cancel each other out, but co-exist. In Martha we see a woman in the midst of grief, standing in a place of faith. In today's passage she makes two extraordinary statements. First, in verses 21 and 22, she tells Jesus: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Then, in verse 27, she makes an astonishing statement of faith: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

Church history being what it is, we have placed much more emphasis on Peter's declaration of faith than on Martha's. But hers is just as great, if not greater, especially given the experience that she speaks out of.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives

We may not be able to tame a dragon, as Martha does in the legend, and our faith may pale into insignificance in comparison with the unshakeable, direct faith that she demonstrates in the Gospel passage. Yet she can be an inspiration to us in a number

of ways, teaching us how to tame our own inner monsters. For one thing, we can be certain that, even when the worst happens, whatever that may represent in our own life, Christ will be with us. In addition, we can know that, even in the darkest moments, we can boldly stand before God and express our doubts and disappointments alongside our hope and faith, without being afraid or ashamed of thinking wrong thoughts. It is safe to open our heart to Jesus even when all seems lost and our feelings are mixed. Clarity and firmness of purpose can exist even in the confusion of grief and loss.

So often, we find our life experience too difficult to make faith seem possible. Martha shows us another way. She knows that, standing before her, despite what has happened, is the Lord of heaven and earth. In one hand she holds her life, with all its pain and bereavement, and in the other she holds her faith in God. God is still God. Faith is still faith. The path continues.

“Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.” John 11:27

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God’ spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk