



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 3 April 2022

Lent 5 – Passiontide begins

As the days of Jesus' suffering and death draw near, God calls us to renew our discipleship. Let us pray for grace to walk courageously in the Way of the Cross, committed to love one another as Christ loves us and faithfully to serve those in need.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"Jesus came to Bethany." *John 12:1*

An Illustration to set the scene

Nearing their journey's end, it is almost impossible for today's pilgrim on the Camino de Santiago to imagine what it must have been like for their medieval predecessors.

Motorways have replaced the Roman roads and cart tracks, a large airport straddles the traditional Pilgrims' Way, and the place where pilgrims washed their bottoms (the literal meaning of the place name Lavacolla) is now the suburb of a growing, busy city.

But there is one place where, with a little imagination, one can put oneself in medieval boots, and that place is Monte do Gozo.

Monte do Gozo, or Mount Joy, offers pilgrims ancient and modern their first glimpse of their journey's end – the ornate towers of the magnificent Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

If Lent is a pilgrimage then today, the Fifth Sunday of Lent, or Passion Sunday, is our Mount Joy, and glimpsing our journey's end we share the same feelings as the pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago – relief, joy and trepidation.

Relief that Lent is nearing its end;
joy as we anticipate the Easter celebrations that lie ahead;
and trepidation as we remember the dark roads we have to travel before arriving at the empty tomb.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Our Mount Joy is the village of Bethany, and in today's Gospel John tells us that the events take place six days before the Passover, in the home of Lazarus.

John tells how Mary takes a pound of costly perfume, uses it to anoint Jesus' feet and then wipes them with her hair.

In response to Judas Iscariot's indignation, Jesus tells the disciples that Mary has bought the perfume for "the day of my burial".

The story is full of echoes and allusions.

John echoes Mark in locating the anointing before the Passion as a preparation for Jesus' death and burial.

By contrast, Luke's account (10:38-42) has no links with the Passion. Rather, the emphasis is on the tearful response of a sinful woman to Jesus' act of forgiveness and acceptance.

It is tempting to think that the allusion to Jesus' forthcoming death and burial is the most important aspect of today's Gospel.

But for us, poised on Mount Joy with Passiontide and Holy Week stretching before us, it is the allusion to the foot washing that demands our attention.

Following on from today's Gospel reading, we see how Jesus washes his disciples' feet as an expression of his love for them, and as a way of drawing them into his life with God.

What Jesus will do for his disciples and will ask them to do for each other, Mary has already done for him in this passage.

We can see in Mary's response what it means to follow Jesus and embrace fully the life of discipleship.

Knowing that the time is short, Mary's response is one of love – generous, overflowing love (contrast Mary's generosity with Judas' niggardly carping).

Before Jesus washes his disciples' feet, Mary washes his.

Before Jesus commands his disciples to "love one another" (John 15:12), Mary shows that she understands the core of Jesus' lived-out message – he is about love in action.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

Today's Gospel takes us – through its echoes and allusions – to the heart of John's story of the Passion of Jesus, to key events in Jesus' "hour" that spell out what it means to be a disciple and to follow in his way.

The ingredients of discipleship are **love and service – love for God and one another, and service to others that unites us in community and with Jesus.**

For many of us Lent is too long.

But a faithful pilgrimage through Passiontide and Holy Week can be enriching, uplifting and challenging.

We dare to expose ourselves to the dark days, the bittersweet events and the pain and suffering of the next fortnight because Christ is risen and has broken the chains of death.

We dare to expose ourselves, because we are not called to face these days alone.

We face these days as members of a Christian community distinguished by love and service.

Lent is not simply a time to give something up.

It is also – as it was for Mary – a time to find feet to wash.

“Jesus came to Bethany.” John 12:1

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 some folk are not able to meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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