

## Monday of Holy Week

March 29, 2021

Isaiah 42:1-7

Psalm 27

John 12: 1-11

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When we read or hear the stories of the events of Jesus' life, there is a unique power at work in the way they probe our own individual stories and the events in our own lives. When we are open to this allowing the Gospel text in, it touches and shapes whatever we are going through. There is a direct effect on us and very often brings clarity.

A Gospel text like today, proclaimed universally for everyone, somehow has an arrow aimed directly at me and all kinds of things crop up in my mind that these words touch. We know this, don't we, countless times, probably.

I don't know *how* this happens, but I do know *that* it happens.

Some people say this is the Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels. It interacts with us in such a way that whatever we need simply arrives.

We will consider today's Gospel text and the response of Love and Life in Mary of Bethany.

Then I will share another story about Love and Life and how another Gospel text arrives at the doorstep of an individual's heart.

### 1) Today's text:

Mary anoints Jesus' feet with expensive perfumed oil and then dries them with her hair. The fragrance fills the whole house.

This poignant scene of tender love is integrally linked to the preceding chapter of the raising of Lazarus, that final sign of Jesus before his death and burial.

At the tomb of Lazarus, Mary believed Jesus as the source of perfect Love. It was revealed in his anguish with grief and tears over the death of Lazarus. Those who saw Jesus weeping said, "See how he loved him!"

He enters the human world of sadness and separation, totally joining himself to those he loves.

What gradually comes to light is that his love, if it is to effectively communicate that life is stronger than death, entails Jesus' own death and burial.

Out of Love, he will embrace this full human condition in order to save this full human condition from the finality of death .

Mary came to believe Jesus is also the source of Life in the calling forth of Lazarus from the tomb.

Mary discerns this empowering Love as the real meaning of Jesus' death and burial. She knows that he enters grief and death so he can bring Life to all lifeless situations.

Her anointing prepares Jesus for what he will do. Jesus must, and will, enter his full humanity into that which is most disintegrating for all humans, that of death.

St. Augustine calls this the "exchange" resulting from the Incarnation of Jesus. In order to be fully human, he had to share in the experience of death and in order for us to have the power to live we must share in divinity.

What effects that wonderful exchange is ultimate Love.

Mary symbolically expressed the pouring out of Jesus' life that would bring life to all believers.

His death brings divine life and transforms death to life that is eternal. Even now. Divine life that is eternal sustains human life now. Our life, our eternal life has already begun.

Our union with Jesus in the deepest sense of his humanity and our humanity – and the deepest sense of the divine life as well – holds us together in grief and in consolation. Death is not everlasting. Life is.

That is what Mary of Bethany knows. This is what we know.

## 2) Now, another story and a Gospel text about Love and Life.

I met Mandy, a child in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium, when she was 4 years old. In the past year, her Daddy died of cancer. She was the apple of his eye and he was her first love as she skipped along beside him.

The signs of her grief and confusion over this loss were painful for all of us who looked out for her and loved her. There was no light in her eyes—no skip in her step.

Until one day in the middle of Lent, her preschool teacher told the story of Jesus' – how he died and then rose from the dead on Easter. When Jesus came back to life on Easter, he promised that we would all live forever.

Mandy listened. She said: "Then, my Daddy will come back to life on Easter. He will come back home again!"

Mandy told everyone with excitement this good news. Her Daddy will be coming back to life on Easter. He will come home. In the days that followed, Mandy could speak of nothing else.

We were all worried. Her teacher, her mom, her grandma, me. We didn't know how to help her; our words failed. How to explain such a mystery of death and resurrection?

How do we not break the bruised reed? How do we tenderly bring her to a new truth? We need to anoint her grief and her joy – and in it all bring her hope? Who can do this?

It fell to me. I prayed a lot.

We decided to bring Mandy to the atrium with her grandma, her teacher and me. We sat by the Parable of the Good Shepherd material. I lit the candle on the table and opened the Bible.

As I read certain verses from John 10. As I read very slowly, Mandy moved the figures of the sheep around the sheepfold following the Shepherd. I told her he loves the sheep so much; he knows their names and they follow him. He will not leave them. He is always with them.

I told her that the Good Shepherd came so that we will have life and have it to the full—that is forever. Jesus our Good Shepherd loves the sheep so much that he would give up his life for them so that they would have Life.

And one day he did give up his life. Mandy laid the Shepherd figure down. She looked at me. I asked: "Did Jesus our Good Shepherd stay dead?" She stood the Shepherd up. "Yes, that is what happened on Easter. Jesus' life will never die."

I told her, "The friends of Jesus told this story to everyone. But they could no longer see Jesus with their eyes – and they could not hear his words in their ears. They knew he was with them, though."

Mandy listened: "They remembered everything he told them. Their hearts were full of love for him and they could feel his love, too. Even though, they could not see him with their eyes-and they could not hear him with their ears. They knew it was true that he was with them in a new and different way. They knew his love and they had his Life in them and it would last forever."

We were silent, watching the candle flame. Mandy held the statue of the Good Shepherd.

Then her Grandma said: "Mandy, do you know that your Daddy loves you? She nodded vigorously.

And do you love your Daddy?

She moved into her Grandma's lap and buried her face, nodding vigorously.

Grandma spoke quietly to Mandy. "We cannot see him with our eyes and we can't hear his voice in our ears, but we know his Love and his Life are with us all the time. We will remember his words and his smile and his love. He is with us in a new way."

We were quiet. Then Mandy slowly put the Good Shepherd with the sheep, took her Grandma's hand and they left.

It was a week later when I learned that after our time together, Mandy never again said that her Daddy would come back to life and be home for Easter.

Somehow, she knew.

These days of Holy Week and most especially the Triduum will find us in the center of these Sacred Mysteries of Love and Life. All the Scriptures will again affect a new consciousness in us and touch us in our own particular stories and needs.

May they also hold us together in our community, our Church and our world.