

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Mar 30th 2015

It has been a few years now but I can still remember those first, grueling post-surgical hours. The minute I opened my eyes I was hit by the severe pain of the surgical procedure and the multiple after-effects of the anesthesia. Although kind voices encircled me and capable hands were adjusting the IV's and blankets, my focus was on both the physical discomfort and my mental anguish. There were many dark thoughts of fear and grief swirling in my mind as I tried to grasp what might lie ahead in my fight against breast cancer.

By the end of that first day, I had been moved to my hospital room and my family had reluctantly departed for the night. I could barely move and as I laid in the darkness, I had a sense of profound desolation like I had never experienced in my life.

Around midnight, I heard the soft voice of one of the nurses asking me if I needed anything. I whispered to her that I was quite miserable. She whispered back: Would you allow me to put some lotion on your shoulders? Before I could reply no thank you, she carefully turned me on my side and started to apply luxurious, scented lotion to my shoulders, neck, arms and back. I will never forget that moment. Her kind and tender gesture brought solace and comfort to the depth of my being. And as her warm hands unlocked my resistances, the tears poured forth like a torrent. She didn't speak, but her touch spoke volumes. My healing had begun.

That memory swept back to me as I read these words in today's Gospel: Mary took a liter of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair; the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Whenever I have imagined this scene, I have thought about the emotional pain of Jesus who was about to be betrayed by Judas and how he also knew that his ministry of care and justice had created enemies who wanted to destroy him. As Mary poured the soothing oil on his feet I believe that Jesus may have been brought to tears by her gesture of devotion. Just as he wept over Lazarus, it is easy to imagine that Mary's loving gesture may have also moved him to tears and perhaps for a few moments, away from his anguish. It is even possible that her tender, extravagant gesture gave Jesus the courage to continue on the path he had chosen.

Although I attempted to thank the nurse who cared for me that night long ago, I doubt if she realized the depth of my gratitude. Over time as I prayed and reflected about it, I came to understand that she had touched something deep within me and that her gesture was like an anointing which signified the presence of God for me. God was in her tender touch.

I believe that we are called to be the presence of God for one another and that Mary most surely was the face and hands of God as she lovingly anointed the feet of Jesus. I hope that her love brought a few moments of consolation and light into the last days of the life of Jesus and that he too felt the hand of God.

My journey with breast cancer treatment was very challenging but there were many Marys along the way to support me and care for my family. My first Mary was the nurse. And although I will never know her name, I pray that she has come to understand the grace-filled moments that her work has provided for her patients.

During this holiest of weeks in the Christian tradition, may we all find ways to be Mary for one another.

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