

## Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Mar 25th 2013

Two thousand years ago Christ said “You always have the poor with you.” And so we do. What examples did He give us for dealing with these poor among us? He healed the sick, and fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, and stood in solidarity with those whom society least respected in His days and times. He held up for all to see what was just and unjust in His society.

Now six days before the culmination of His life, with probably sure knowledge that His death was imminent, Jesus admonishes Judas for his pettiness. Jesus teaches us that not only do the poor need physical sustenance, but they (as we all do) also need spiritual uplifting. Mary’s action of anointing Jesus’ feet was an act of love, of generous human interaction that she felt she could only express by sharing this costly thing. Jesus knew that His generous acceptance of her gift would bring her much spiritual solace. Yes, the oil could have been sold and the proceeds distributed. But such practical action would diminish the gift that Mary brought. Had she decided to sell the oil and distribute it, I suspect Jesus would have been equally grateful to her. Jesus accepted her gift in compassion, in connection with her, in seeing within her the divinity that resides in us all.

Many indigenous peoples understand this giving of possessions to ease the discomfort of another who is in need of spiritual uplifting. At the time of death, Native American communities include giveaways as part of the grieving process. And the gifts move in both directions – the friends and relatives of the community give to the family in their time of need, and the family in turn gives back to community members as an expression of gratitude for the life of the deceased.

Jesus’ interaction with Judas also teaches us to put ourselves in position of the giver, the other. When my grandson finds an interesting item in his endless curiosity quests, and brings it to me, he is sharing his joy of discovery and love for me. He doesn’t see that I might not value the dead bug he has found as he does (and he hasn’t learned that his Nana definitely does not value the dead or living bugs he finds!). My enthusiastic and grateful reaction is not for the item itself, but for his act of sharing. So too with Jesus – He is not moved by the costliness of the oil in judging Mary’s gift, the value that others might put on the item itself, but instead reacts to her generosity in using this item to do something kind for Him. Jesus teaches us to see the humanity in the giver, and the generosity that it takes to give even when one is a member of the “poor.” Recall the tenderness Jesus felt for the poor widow who gave her last two coins.

As I write this, the Conclave of Cardinals is meeting in Rome to elect a new pope. My hope is that the man the Spirit guides them to choose can, among other qualities, possess the attitude that Jesus

expresses toward the poor – that they are always with us, they need our active commitment to justice and direct assistance to address their physical needs, and most importantly they also need our compassion to uplift them spiritually and to cherish their humanity.

And so my prayer today is twofold – that I may more closely mirror Jesus by my generosity in giving and in receiving, and that the new pope may emulate the compassion of Christ for all the poor that still reside with us.

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