

The Still Point
A Time of Meditation and Reflection
The Fifth Sunday in Lent

... At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance...

T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

Like a tent in the wilderness, God's table stands ready;

A place of sanctuary and safety, of hospitality and healing.

Come, all you who are tired and travel-stained, footsore and famished;

Come with your fellow travelers to find companionship and comfort.

Jesus waits to meet us here and welcome us in,

Offering rest and renewal, solace and strength, for the journey still to come.

Opening Prayer

Lord, help us to see: to see what is eternally good and true, and having seen, to go on searching until we come to the joys of heaven. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Gospel

John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Poem: "Lord, dost Thou Look on Me"

By Christina Rossetti (b. 1830)

Lord, dost thou look on me, and will not I

Launch out my heart to Heaven to look on Thee?

Here if one loved me I should turn to see,

And often think on him and often sigh,

And by a tender friendship make reply

To love gratuitous poured forth on me,

And nurse a hope of happy days to be,
And mean "until we meet" in each good-bye.
Lord, thou dost look and love is in Thine Eyes,
Thy Heart is set upon me day and night,
Thou stoapest low to set me far above;
O Lord, that I may love Thee make me wise;
That I may see and love Thee grant me sight;
And give me love that I may give Thee love.

Meditation

The gospel reading for this, the fifth Sunday in Lent, has so many layers, and a number of possible meanings or perspectives. For many of us reading or re-reading this story, the questions that come up may outnumber the answers! As just one of those questions, what does Jesus mean when he says: "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

One way to approach this story is through the lens of relationship. Jesus continually calls us into loving relationship that expands beyond what we can ever imagine (in the words of a favorite hymn, a love that is "beyond all thought and fantasy.") Though it seems needlessly extravagant, Mary's gift of anointing with generous amounts of expensive perfume can be seen as a heartfelt response to that call, which takes on special significance as a prelude to the events leading to Calvary.

A lavish gift of any kind has the power to surprise or even shock us. Depending on its nature, it may also remind us of the divine love that knows no boundaries -- in the words of a favorite hymn, a love that is deep, broad, and high, "beyond all thought and fantasy."

In the poem by Christina Rossetti, the poet is distressed about her failure to respond to this very call to relationship. "Lord, dost Thou look on me, and will I not launch out my heart to Heaven to look on Thee?" With human love we often respond to the giver, gaze on them, and think about them. Yet we may forget, or simply fail to see, God's "gratuitous" love for us. The poet concludes by asking the Lord for that sight, and to grant her the love that she can return (possibly feeling inadequate without that assistance).

Questions for Reflection

What aspects of the gospel story are most striking and meaningful to you during this Lenten season? Which ones would you like to carry into Holy Week with you?

Does the poem intersect with your own experience in particular ways? Are there ways that you identify with the speaker in the poem?

Do aspects of our human relationships provide us clues to, or insights into, our relationship with Jesus?

Prayers

We bring before God someone whom we have met or remembered today

We bring to God someone who is hurting tonight and needs our prayer

We bring to God a troubled situation in our world

We bring to God, silently, someone whom we find hard to forgive or trust

We bring ourselves to God that we might grow in generosity of spirit, clarity of mind, and warmth of affection

We offer our thanks to God for the blessings in our lives

We name before God those who have died.

Gracious God, you hear all our prayers: those we speak aloud, those we hold in our hearts, and those prayers for which we have no words. Hear the prayers of your people, and grant them as may be best for us, for the sake of your holy name. **Amen.**

Accept our thanks for all you have done, O God. Our hands were empty, and you filled them.

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with us every step of the way, and be our guide as our road changes and turns, and the blessing of God our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life be among us now and remain with us forever. **Amen.**

Poem and Reflections this month offered by: Frank Nowell