

A homily for Monday of Holy Week from Mr Chris Webb

29<sup>th</sup> March 2021

John 12:1-11

What a waste!

The gospel reading set for today is yet another of my favourites. There is such a lot going on in that little home at Bethany in this short story. It's Martha, of course, who is bustling around serving up dinner while Mary does, well, what? She's not sitting at Jesus' feet just listening to his words of wisdom. She is taking an active role this time, but no, its not doing the housework or helping Martha to prepare and serve the meal. Now that really would be a turn up for the books.

When I was a boy there were a couple of things which on the face of it were to do with the value of things and which I thought perhaps to be more amusing than bemusing.

One of them was the proclamation outside some public houses, "Free House". I knew enough about the world to know that houses cost money, so what did this notice mean?

The other thing, in this line of thought, was the description of something which was obviously of great value, being described as "priceless".

Today our society seems to be obsessed with the price of things. How many times have you read an article in a newspaper or magazine which sometimes for no apparent reason, refers either to the value of someone's house or the extent of their wealth?

These days there are plenty of places to look -online - for the value of just about anything. There are price comparison sites for a whole range of goods and services. You can find out how much your neighbour's house was sold for. You can get a pretty good idea of what that old book which has been untouched on your bookshelf for years, might be worth *if* you decided to sell it. There is a price for everything. Society puts a price on everything.

Judas was someone living in a culture far different from ours. Or was he? How different? He may not have had the benefit of the world wide web but Judas was one of those people who knew the price of everything. Not the *value* of everything but he could quote you a price.

He was shocked!

That calculator of a brain of his was going into overdrive. That dreamy Martha woman was tipping out perfume worth, let me think, yes, 300 denarii give or take a couple of percent. Tipping it out on Jesus' sweaty, dusty feet. What on earth is she thinking about? What a waste! Judas, struggling perhaps to keep emotion at bay, voices his concern at this shocking, unforgivable waste. He concentrates on

expressing his upset in a way which Jesus would be able to understand. In a way which he may have thought might even earn a commendation from Jesus. The value of that perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Now there's a worthy thought. Who could possibly fault that sort of logic?

Jesus!

Was Jesus being callous when he told Judas that "You will always have the poor."? Is that something you might have heard when out on a charity collection? I have had people say something much like that when I have been out collecting. Charity begins at home and all that -meaning look out for your own interests first.

Jesus, knew exactly how terrible the plight of the financially poor person really was. Those who were cut off from the means of earning a living. Those willing and able to work who could not get a job. Just like those people in one of his stories who stood as part of a group standing in the heat of the sun, hoping to be hired for a day's work, and not being chosen for yet another day. Losing hope as the minutes and hours ticked away. He had seen them. Jesus also knew what a terrible distraction wealth could be for those who were financially wealthy. He saw their struggle to find a use for their excess wealth and the measures they might take to hang onto it. You might think of some encounters that Jesus had with such people or a story he might have told about such a person.

Jesus throughout his ministry showed compassion for the poor and marginalised. He was not being callous in today's reading. What comes to mind as I read the gospel story are the words of the Apostle Paul. "If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing." (1 Corinthians 13.3)

It is the paramount importance of love; giving oneself in love; of giving your all, in love which shines through this story about the events which took place in that house at Bethany where Jesus had been given space and solace by his friends. Judas' crocodile tears for the poor are dismissed. It is the sweet perfume of love outpoured, that filled that house as Jesus approached his time of trial.

Love that is without ties or preconditions. Love that is beyond anything that money can buy. It's absolutely priceless and at the same time very costly!

Amen