

Lent 5, 2013, Holy Trinity
John 12:1-8

It often happens in a movie, on television and in novels that at the meal table the tension rises and we find that anger and bitterness bubble to the surface.

On the other hand, sharing a common meal should be a pleasurable occasion.

Now look at today's Gospel reading.

It is a Saturday night, Jesus and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover feast.

It is the last week of Jesus' earthly life.

On the way they call in to the house of Lazarus in Bethany.

Previously Lazarus had been restored to life by Jesus.

He was there with his sisters Martha and Mary whom we have met previously as we read the Gospels.

Martha was the one who seems to have done the preparation and the serving of the meal on a previous occasion as well as in this incident.

Mary, on the other hand, appeared to be the quiet one who was prepared to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to him speaking.

There is, however, tragedy in this little scene.

With the rest of the world plotting to kill Jesus, he could expect to find refuge in the sharing of a meal in this house with a group of his followers.

There is, however, already tension rising.

The tension between Mary and Judas is obvious, but there is also evidence of tension between Martha and Mary: the narrative tells us that "Martha served.....then Mary took a pound of perfume..."

Mary takes centre stage by her outrageous behaviour of pouring this expensive perfume, which had its origins from the root of a nard plant from the hills of India, then letting down her hair and wiping up the perfume with her hair.

The act of letting down her hair in such company was bad enough but the extravagance of using the perfume so that the fragrance of the perfume filled the house.

This was just too much: this was right over the top and Judas said so.

Then we have Jesus' response which is astonishing and over which scholars do not seem to agree as to its meaning.

The whole incident, however, points forward to Jesus' death and burial.

During this Lenten period we have observed our own discipline of worship, prayer, fasting and giving perhaps not as extravagantly as Mary but, nevertheless, we have been doing the best we can.

Now we gather around this altar to share the common meal of the Body and Blood of Jesus in this Eucharist as we make our way forward to share in the death and burial of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Where are you in relation to the characters in this Gospel reading?

Are you the shameless Mary loving and worshipping Jesus with everything that you have as you kneel at Jesus' feet?

Are you Martha who does all the hard work but who loves and serves Jesus in this way?

Are you Lazarus who has been raised to new life at some earlier time in your life?

Are you Judas who is cautious, prudent, reliable, looking after the meagre resources of the group with no steady, regular income, anxious to provide for their needs and still having something left over to provide for the poor?

Forget about Judas the betrayer as you consider whether you are Judas in this scene. I am sure that the rest of the disciples did not think of him as a betrayer at this time.

Use this week to consider who you are like.

You will probably find that you are a combination of most of these.

Then ask yourself "What Jesus is saying to you during the Lenten period".