

Homily for Monday in Holy Week, April 6, 2020

The Holy Eucharist

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Year A: Isaiah 42:1–9; Psalm 36:5–10; John 12:1–11*

The story of the anointing of Jesus' feet is found in all four gospels. For Luke, you may recall, it is part of a story of a Pharisee named Simon who had invited Jesus to dinner.<sup>1</sup> This Simon became upset when Jesus allowed a woman who was a sinner to wash his feet with her tears, wipe them with her hair, and to kiss them. Jesus said to him, "I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."<sup>2</sup> The woman's sins were forgiven.

In Mark and Matthew, this anointing occurs after Jesus has entered Jerusalem, in John it happens the day before, six days before a Passover that fell on a Saturday.<sup>3</sup> Lazarus, Martha, and Mary are there with

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 7:36–50.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 7:44b–47.

<sup>3</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 356.

him. The raising of Lazarus seals Jesus' fate as far as the high priest Cai'aphas, the chief priests and the Pharisees of the council are concerned. But the decision to crucify him belonged to Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect—governor—of Jude'a from the years 26 to 36 of the Christian Era.<sup>4</sup>

Until the adoption of the Revised Common Lectionary by the Episcopal Church, American Prayer Books have followed the 1662 Prayer Book of the Church of England and omitted John's story of the burial of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> We've been including it since 2012.

In John there's no rush to bury Jesus, though Joseph of Arimathea goes secretly to Pilate to ask for the body—another sign that Pilate was responsible for his decision to execute Jesus. Nicodemus was there too. He had sought out Jesus at night during Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem. Later he defended Jesus before those who were ready to condemn him; he asked, “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?”<sup>6</sup> Nicodemus brought the valuable ointment and spices that he and Joseph used as they wrapped Jesus' body in linen and buried him.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pontius-Pilate>, (accessed 6 April 2020).

<sup>5</sup> John 19:28–42.

<sup>6</sup> John 7:51.

Yesterday we heard Matthew's Passion. It begins in Gethsemane where Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." From today, our gospel lessons are from John. There is no agony in the garden. No words of suffering from the cross. He is not alone. His mother and the unnamed disciple known only as the disciple Jesus loved are there. Jesus said to his mother, "Women, behold your son." And to the disciple whom he loved, "Behold, your mother." John adds one other detail: to fulfill Scripture, he says, "I thirst."<sup>7</sup>

Jesus' last words after healing the man born blind were these, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father."<sup>8</sup> And this he did for all.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> John 19:28.

<sup>8</sup> John 10:17–18.