

If you ask me to pick a passage of the Bible that is the most beautiful, I will pick the one we have read today. There are three other passages (Mt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9; Lk. 7:36-38) that are similar to this, but I will focus on the account in the Gospel of John. There is the profound pathos that is difficult to put into words, but if the time and the circumstance are right, one can almost feel it.

On the surface, you see the perspective of the practical use of a costly resource, a very expensive perfume, nard. Instead of pouring it over the feet, why not sell it, and use the proceeds for the poor? The writer of the Gospel provides a footnote that explains the true motivation behind the objection: Judas Iscariot, who raised that objection, was a thief. The writer intimates to the readers that Judas wanted to skim the proceeds from selling the expensive perfume.

But the writer does not understand the meaning of the act that took place. He simply

recorded what he saw. From the writer's point of view, what he saw was that a woman, Mary, took a pound of very expensive fragrant oil, and did something no one else would ever think about doing: she poured it over Jesus' feet, and wiped them clean with her hair.

The only person who provides the meaning to Mary's act is Jesus. Yes, pouring the expensive oil over someone's feet, even if those feet belonged to Jesus, would have looked extravagant, and looked like a terrible waste of a valuable resource. But Jesus put it in the context of his impending burial. Jesus explained to the incredulous group why Mary bought it: she bought it, so that she would use it, when his body is being prepared for the burial. Basically, Jesus told others to leave her alone. Jesus not only did not want others touch the personal property that belonged to Mary, but also respected her wish to anoint him in her way.

That raises some questions. How did Jesus know that Mary planned to use the pound of pure nard to anoint his body for the burial? It does not make sense, because, a pound of pure nard is not the kind of item that you can buy casually, especially for a woman of her station, such as Mary.

In order to get some idea, we need to look into the economic class to which Mary belonged. We do not know for sure, but we can safely assume that Lazarus, Martha, and Mary did not belong to a well-to-do household. They lived in Bethany, a small town away from Jerusalem, and when Jesus visited them, Martha was personally preparing the meal in the kitchen area. That means that they could not afford to have servants or maids: they must have been the commoners, the working class people.

For a working class people, they would not normally want to sink a great sum of cash into a luxurious, cosmetic item. If they indeed decided to buy it, then, it

would have taken a serious effort and time to accumulate the funds to be able to afford to buy a pound of pure nard, and they would have had a pressing cause that fit the occasion.

I did some research on the internet, and according to a website, nard is herb (*nardostachys jatamansi*) that grows on the foothills of Himalaya. Its root contains the precious oil, and the extract from the root is the prized fragrance. Usually, nard is mixed with the finest of the olive oil. The "pure" nard which Mary owned might have been a distilled collection of the extract.

A pound of pure nard, then, would have been of an immense value, for, according to an anecdote on the same website, Horace offered to send Virgil (both the contemporary of Jesus) a whole barrel of his best wine, in exchange for a vial of nard. The Markan account estimates its value at 300 denarii. A denarius was a day's wage for a day laborer. So a pound of pure nard

was worth the annual income of an average working class person (not counting the Sabbaths). Then we can surmise that it would have taken Mary many years to save up enough to buy the nard.

So what drove Mary to dump the whole year's worth of income on Jesus feet? Maybe she did not dump the entire pound. But you get the idea. No doubt, it looked like an obscene extravagance to the onlookers, if not insane.

I am not certain, if Mary had intended to make that act the prelude to the burial. Maybe, she had been saving it for her dowry, who knows. I am not certain, if Mary had anticipated the death of his beloved teacher. What I am certain, however, is that she loved Jesus with her whole heart. She chose the nard to express her love no matter what others might think. She sacrificed the best of her worldly possessions, in order to express her love.

And it was not just the expenditure of the worldly

possession. In order to express her love, she used her ample hair to wipe Jesus' feet dry. Mary used the best of what a common woman possessed—her perfume, and her hair, in order to express her love for Jesus.

I am saying the word, "love." But John did not use the word in his description of the motivation. I am sure the writer did not know it was love. Jesus did not use the word to recognize the act Mary carried out. Mary did not verbalize the word, either. But I am certain that Jesus knew what drove Mary to sacrifice the best of her worldly possessions. Jesus did not verbalize it, but affirmed that Mary bought the perfume for his burial. No one else knew what was in Mary's heart. Jesus was the only one who knew it. But Jesus did not say that it was love.

That is the thing about love. If you truly love someone, you do not spare the best of your worldly possessions. If you truly love someone, you do not need the verbal communication, in order

to express your love. Love that needs a constant verbal affirmation is still an insecure and incomplete love. Mary showed Jesus her heart through her action; and Jesus fully understood Mary's heart, and without having said the word, "love," he let Mary know that he did understand her heart.

The true love—the love that comes from the deepest of one's spirit—is communicated without having to verbalize it. The true, spiritual love is communicated by other means than verbalization. The verbal communication is probably the lowest form of communication. The true love is surely found in action.

How many opportunities were there for Mary to pour a pound of pure nard on Jesus feet? For Mary, there was only one. Contrarily, there are many opportunities to help the poor, for the poor are always there. But there was only one chance for Mary. And Mary's act was not like the expression that anyone

else could copy. It was unique to Mary, and no one else could imitate or understand what Mary did to Jesus. It was that special.

There comes the time, when we want to express our love for someone whom we love. We may assume that there would be many such opportunities. We may feel that we could find the right time any time, or some time, or whenever we are ready.

No, we don't. We do not always have each other. The best of the worldly possessions lose their luster quickly, when we lose our beloved. The best of our worldly possessions become meaningless, when our beloved are not with us any more. When the time comes, only the best of our possessions, only the boldest of our action, will do for our beloved.