

April 6, 2025 – Fifth Sunday in Lent

Devotion, Humility and Service by Pastor Julio Romero

Gospel: John 12:1-11

From my humble perspective, this is one of the strangest Gospel stories we encounter in the Bible, and here's how it unfolds. Jesus and His disciples have returned to Lazarus' home. As expected, He is welcomed by Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. They are all invited to the table, and it is not the first time we hear of Martha being busy serving them while Mary does what she does best—spending time with the Lord, not helping Martha with all the work. So far, everything seems familiar—business as usual. Martha is being Martha, and Mary is being Mary.

But here's the part of the story that I hope you find as fascinating as I do: Mary takes a pound of expensive perfume in the form of oil, pours it on Jesus' feet, and dries them with her hair. The fragrance of the oil fills the entire house. I wonder what was going through Mary's mind when she poured this costly perfume on Jesus' feet. This oil was so valuable—it could have been the wages of a worker for an entire year. To pour it all out on Jesus? That's not something anyone would expect.

However, what Mary did was not entirely out of the ordinary. In those days, people's feet suffered from walking on rough, dusty roads while wearing sandals. It was customary for a host to wash a guest's feet and sometimes anoint them with oil to soothe the discomfort of long walks in high temperatures and dust. Given these customs, what Mary did wasn't entirely unusual. What set it apart was the type of oil, the quantity she used, and the way she did it.

Let's remember that anointing feet has special significance in the Scriptures. It symbolizes humility, devotion, and service. On that day, Mary gave the best she had to Jesus. This act was her way of showing gratitude to Jesus for resurrecting her brother Lazarus. As she knelt and wiped Jesus' feet with her hair, she worshipped Him. It was an act of spontaneous devotion, a desire to serve Him.

In those days, foot washing and anointing were typically tasks reserved for servants. But Mary took on the role of a servant, humbling herself before the Lord. She showed us an example of how to demonstrate gratitude to Jesus—by offering our best, being humble, and serving with devotion.

The Lord Jesus has done so much for us—He suffered, went to the cross, died, and was resurrected so we might have hope. Through His Holy Spirit, He continues to

bless us, show us the way, and perform miracles in our lives. The question is: how do we respond to all He has done for us? Do we respond like Mary—with gratitude, devotion, humility, and a willingness to serve?

In this story, one of Jesus' disciples completely missed the significance of what Mary was doing. That disciple was Judas Iscariot, known for betraying Jesus. Judas clearly lacked gratitude, devotion, humility, and a heart to serve. He had lost—or perhaps never had—the willingness to serve the Lord. His heart was already dark, and we see this long before the night he betrayed Jesus with a kiss. The Gospel reveals that Judas was in charge of the common purse—the money used to support Jesus' ministry—and he was already stealing from it.

To Judas, what Mary did seemed like a waste of money. He criticized her, asking, "Why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" Judas pretended to care about the poor while stealing from his own friends. The Bible makes it clear that Judas never cared about the poor. Yes, Jesus said we will always have the poor with us, but that doesn't mean He didn't care for them. In fact, Jesus' entire ministry was centered on and among the poor.

We know that poverty is not part of God's plan. God holds the poor in a special place in His heart, and poverty is the result of human greed and a broken world order. Jesus Himself was poor. The very one through whom everything was created was among the have-nots. He knew firsthand the realities of a world where greed is rampant. Today, some people are not satisfied with being millionaires; they aim to become billionaires. Big corporations are content only if their profits reach hundreds of millions of dollars, while the number of poor continues to grow.

This is why the poor will always be with us. But to give the best to God means remembering the poor. For you and me to give our best to God means becoming caretakers of our brothers and sisters, especially those less fortunate than ourselves—just as Jesus did. Mary, Lazarus' sister, gave her most valuable treasure, her expensive perfume. What are we giving to Jesus? To the same Jesus who had nothing in this world, no servants, and yet was called Master. He had no degrees, yet they called Him Teacher. He had no medicines, yet they called Him Healer. He had no army, yet kings feared Him. He won no military battles, yet He conquered the world. He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him. He was buried in a tomb, yet He lives today.

Let us feel honored to serve our Savior, who loves us. He deserves our best—our devotion, our humility, our service, our worship, and our love. **Amen.**