

Eve of Thursday Pascha

Anointing His feet with fragrant oil – Mary of Bethany

Father Luke Sidarous - 12th April, 2017

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God. Amen

As, you know dearly beloved, that the Lord spent a day such as this in Bethany, just as Judas was negotiating with the Chief priests to sell the Lord for thirty pieces of silver.

The incident that overshadowed this entire day, was the type of worship and the pouring of the fragrant oil from those souls loyal to Christ.

Of course, the world is as it is. In that time that Christ, to Him be all glory, according to his divine providence, accomplishes salvation of the world and dies for the sake of all sinners, (for the sake of all the sinners of the world), what was the state of the world at this time? Just as it always was.

The religious institution; the Chief priests, the Scribes and the Pharisees, were plotting to kill Him. They were afraid for their positions, their reputation, and for their personal concerns.

The remainder of those in the temple were concerned with hideous profits, and how to gain financially one way or another, through abominable business.

What about those outside of the religious scope, outside of temple, worship, Passover and the like, where were they? Each going his own way. People were living in the world in every way. Some living for the flesh, some for adultery, some for fraud, some for deception, living in all kinds of sins, and those preoccupied with worldly matters as in the days of Noah, as in the days of Lot, this is the world!

Amongst this strange world, Christ, to Him be all glory, found a small house that became His resting place, with a few friends; Mary, Martha and Lazarus. These were His few beloved, amongst this drowning world, although the world should have appreciated this great act of salvation. Just as Isaiah spoke, "All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

In the words of Jesus' evangelism he says, "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt 11:28). When it came to pass that He needed to labour for our salvation, he found a small place to rest. He who was the comforter of the weary and carrier of their burdens, looked for a place to rest. When He said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." (Matt 26:38). When he carried the sins of the world, He found Himself a place. Where is this place? A small house.

What is this place worth by the world's standards? Not much at all. They were just a few people. Are these few able to refresh His soul, comfort Him and give Him joy in all His sadness? Well, that's what happened.

Who is Mary of Bethany? She is one who worships Him, and is that worth so much to Him? Basically, she adores Him. A faithful love from the heart, and she is very humble. Others may have been seated on seats or benches. But she was

content to sit at His feet. These are the ones who bring Him joy. Unlike those sitting in the high places, who want the glory of people. But she was humble. She knew the place that would bring joy to His heart amidst all His suffering is to bow down at His feet.

We here are also a minority in a world full of defilement, adultery, deceit. So we, being a few individuals, what if we turn our little church here into Bethany. What if we seek out a place to settle at the feet of Jesus, which is 'humility of the heart'. It's not to sit on the floor per se. But it's the souls that discovered how to please God from within, by their humility.

The Bible tells us the story, that the woman anointing Him with fragrant oil, "brought an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure Nard." (Mark 14:3)

Three hundred Dinari, a year's wages, very expensive indeed, and she broke that flask, and poured the oil. It's a great wonder indeed! Who is Jesus to her that she should do all that? A few days before, her brother was dead. Isn't her brother more deserving of this anointing perfume. They used to anoint the body of the dead in this way. Lazarus was dead and this valuable perfume was on hand, so isn't her dead brother the most precious to her, on whom she should pour the oil.

No; well, she had come outside of that circle. When she loved the Lord Jesus from all her heart, she loved Him more than father, mother, brother and friends.

Could there be someone in our little church who has reached this level of Grace? So that Jesus is worth more to them than father and brother?

When she poured it, she did not speak. Why? Because true love is spoken in few words. She said nothing, she simply acted, but Christ revealed it. He said, when Judas complained, He told Him to leave her alone, saying that 'she has reserved this expensive oil for my burial'.

But no one anoints the living. They anoint the dead to remove the smell of decay and death. But she poured it on His body while alive, meaning she knew what was to come.

She knew he would die but would not decay. She knew He is Holy and poured the oil, not on his dead body, but because she was sure He will be raised. He does not need the anointing when he dies. But she pours it knowing well that he is the Resurrection and the Life. He does not need this when He dies. But because she worships Him truly, so she knows matters that no one else knows.

What is the evidence that you worship Christ truly from the heart, it is that you know Him personally in a way no one else does. That is why I tell you, He revealed why she did what she did. So why didn't she reserve it till he died? Because she knew He would rise, and it would serve no benefit then.

Remember when the women early Sunday morning went carrying the spices, what did they do with it? Nothing. They did nothing with it. They had gone to anoint the dead body of the Lord and found that He had risen.

However, like Mary, having the mystery of true worship means you will never miss the chance, because what is revealed to you when you worship at the feet of Jesus, which your heart knows in its depths, and which your love knows from within, no one else can know.

So, can this church delight the heart of Christ? Well, yes, when it has within it this type of worshipers. We attend, we glorify Christ and sing all day and night saying 'Thok teti Gom, during Pascha (To you is the Power, the Glory, and the Honour), but the matter is so different because Christ, who dwelt in Bethany, searches the hearts.

(I, the LORD, search the heart, test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings. Jer 17:10).

He can see those sitting around Him and knows the intentions of each person internally. This type of persons, at the time of Christ's suffering, are more valuable than all the world. Believe me, for the very few, the Lord bestows his goodness upon the whole world.

So, what will Mary receive from people for her loving act? Nothing. Did she want a reward? Not at all. True love resides in the giving without receiving. True love is giving only, and if there is a reciprocal then it is not real love.

In Bethany, within this small gathering Lazarus could be found in Christ's embrace, happy to be there. Even before He raised him from the dead, he was known to be His beloved. 'Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.' (John 11:5)

In this conspiracy, the presence of one such as Lazarus angered Satan, because he is a witness to the Divine Glory of God, and His power of resurrection from the dead. So, what did the chief priests conspire? Well, they felt his presence was evidence of this and so he must die. This was the idea well before the time of the Cross of Christ and to this day!

Anyone whom Christ raises from the dead and lives as a Christian, Satan says, 'He must die', because he lives as a witness against the abominations of the world. Christ said 'Because I live, you also will live. (John 14:19)

Anyone who lives this life as Christ did, the world will call for his death.

In the First Century of Christianity, historians recorded that 6 million Christians were martyred. They had only just begun to come into the world. But the one who sought the death of Lazarus because it was evidence of the resurrection, divinity, and life of Christ, continues to this day. The world cannot stand anyone who witness for Christ with a living testimony; not with a raising of the physical body from death, but with the testimony of a true repentance. One who lives in Christ is naturally against this world.

'If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.' (John 15:19)

So, the presence of Lazarus, in Bethany in which we dwell, as a witness to the Grace of God, is what soothes His heart and brings Him joy. When He raised him from the tomb and then Lazarus sat in His embrace, people came to see.

He witnessed without words, but with his new life, by his presence and not by any preaching. Don't be fooled into thinking that preaching is much, but it is the weakest and least form of witnessing to Christ; it is of no value.

But rather it is the witness of one's life; he was dead and now lives, he was defiled by sin and is now pure. A witness to Christ who delights His heart very much and comforts him very much. Christ will find His rest in souls such as these, in silence, without a need for words. What is needed is presence and life.

Who else lives in this house? Well, there is Martha who works, not a spiritual work, but simple labour of the hands. He is very pleased with her, not for the work, but because she does it with self-denial. At one point, long ago, she complained and said to Him, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me." (Luke 10:40)

She was basically saying, my sister is sitting at your feet, while I slave away in the kitchen working to prepare food and drink. He said to her, why are you so concerned, your time will come. Right now, you are occupied with many things and are going with the motions (Luke 10:41), but she 'has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:42), and you will have the same.

From that time, she worked with complete self-denial, ten times as much as she worked before but with gladness in her heart. To receive a reward from people is refused utterly. There are those, thank God, in our church that labour and serve, feeling that they are nothing.

Do we have those who resemble Mary, who worship with tears, pour out their soul and give their love? Yes, there are those people, although few. Do we have those who resemble Lazarus, who witnessed to Christ with his life, without speaking much but people will notice his living testimony. The light doesn't need to speak, it is just present. Are there souls like these in the church? Yes, thank God there is.

We wish from the heart that all of us, without exception, would please His heart, and that He would find His rest in our church, in our homes, in our hearts. We wish that from all our hearts and ask that he would allow us to be so.

Amidst this brazen world, He will find His rest, although they are few. They asked Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate." (Luke 13:23)

But I have hope in the Lord, that many souls whom we do not know will receive the same position. Only He knows them. Those who worship him with great faithfulness, in secret, and those who serve Him and go unnoticed, are a great many.

We often feel sad for ourselves, that we are coming in and out in the presence of people, as a priest or as a deacon and receive comments

about doing this or that. Sometimes we wish that we could be hidden from view. There are those who are indeed hidden, and their value in His eyes is so great.

In every generation; are they present? But did not the Lord complete His sufferings? No, because the sufferings of His body (since His Body is the church) carried to this day as a witness against the world's vulgarity, adultery, greed, and against the world's envy and hatred.

The church carries all this in its body and is characterised by its wounds. The body of Christ, the living God, differs from the body of any human being, because it's characterised by Stigmata (wounds of His Passions).

In the same way the living Church of Christ is characterised by His sufferings, His pains, His cross. This is the sign of Christianity and of true worship; that we carry our crosses without announcing it and without complaining, and to show that He is alive by the Cross of Christ and that the Cross is something very precious.

These days people are disturbed. what is wrong? People died for His sake and experienced suffering. But when you look at it you will find that it is momentary suffering. Well people die in accidents and due to diseases and even without disease. But then we ask who are these beautiful chosen ones, who have partaken of his sufferings, in the week of His passions? (referring to the Palm Sunday bombing, in Tanta Egypt).

But why do we then go on about it with great sadness and despair, with a mood of solemnity and depression. There are some who know how to turn this mourning into joy in the moment itself, truly witnessing to Christ. But there are others who watch internet videos of the events day and night and wallow and cry.

Well, the Cross is great, the Cross is our pride, carrying the Cross is an honour, and death for the sake of Christ is Life.

We thank God that we have come to such days as these. Some people live, miserably complaining that we live in dark times. But we need to thank God that there are people who witness to Christ with their life and their death.

I was speaking to a dear friend in Alexandria today, and he told me the most amazing thing regarding these events. The incident happened on Sunday morning, and he tells me he has never seen such numbers in attendance at church as he did that very same evening following the tragedy, and that the numbers grew exponentially, which is a great blessing we thank God for.

Just as those who gathered around Christ and brought joy to Him at the time of His suffering like Mary, Martha and Lazarus, we believe that when He comes again, He will find such as these, just as it was said, "when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the Earth?" (Luke 18:8).

We have faith that He will, He knows He will. He knows the hearts of His children, and the hearts of those who worship Him, love Him and serve Him, giving their lives for Him and humbling themselves at His feet. Those hating the glory of men and the reward of men.

Let us be Bethany, the small, neglected home, not known to people, but known to Christ as the place in which He rests.

Glory be to God forever. Amen.