



## *GOSPEL GOSSIP*

**Mary anointed Jesus' feet  
and wiped them with her hair**

**John 12. 1-8**

**Sunday 6 April**

St John's gospel is full of surprises – and shocks. In the gospel set for today, the fifth Sunday in Lent, we here how Mary, the sister of the Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead, once again differed from her sister in her care for Jesus as a guest. Whereas, as before, Martha did all the practical work whilst Mary sat at Jesus' feet, so now Martha serves dinner and Mary? She took a pound of very costly ointment and anointed Jesus' feet before wiping them with her hair.

We might think this an extraordinary act under any circumstances, but is even more so considering the culture in which this happened. Costly perfume to anoint a visitor's feet, when a ritual bathe was considered more than sufficient? And the feet, shod only in sandals in a hot dusty country? And then how these feet were wiped. A woman's 'crowning glory', so to use her hair for such a purpose would have been scandalous. Yet Mary once more shows her devotion to Jesus in not just a dramatic display, but in a self-effacing, self-degrading action.

- Was this action of Mary's merely melodramatic?
- Should she have 'wasted' money on the nard (perfume) for this purpose?
- What was the point she was trying to make?
- Should Jesus have allowed it?
- What would have been the reaction of those present?

Judas' reaction was predictable. Masking his greed for personal gain, he criticised Mary for her generosity, and expected Jesus to agree with him. However, Jesus once fails to criticise Mary and condones her action, however odd this might seem then and now, saying that she was doing this for him now, but that the poor would always be there to be served.

- Are you embarrassed by the thought of this action?
- Would you appreciate someone's selfless service to you?
- Are you prepared to be reckless in the showing of your love?
- Could you perform such an action before others?
- Why would you want to do as Mary?

As approach the final weeks of Jesus'; earthly life, we can appreciate that his disciples may not have realised how little time that they would have left with Jesus in his earthly form. And we need to remember how perhaps we have suffered regret and sadness at leaving things undone and unsaid after someone dear to us has died. Yet do we always show our love and devotion to Jesus? The 'poor are always with us', but do we see his face in them? Are we prepared to serve him through them? Do we believe that in showing love to others particularly those who are 'poor' we are showing our love for him? Mary's actions challenge us to consider all these questions – and more.