

Christof Wolf, S.J.

The Moment Is For Me

An Ignatian Guide to Prayer

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THIRD WEEK: SUFFERING OF JESUS

An essential quality of every human being is the capacity for compassion. Am I capable of making a victim's perspective my own? Even if the suffering of the other person will always remain his own, I can sincerely pity him, comfort him, take him in my arms. And I feel yet another pain, because my own values and ideals have also been wounded by what happened to him. This is the connection to the dynamics of the first week.

In the Old Testament we find the image of the hardened heart. Yahweh promises the Israelites a new heart instead of the old one made of stone — a new heart that can suffer. Ignatius had such a heart; he had the “gift of tears” and wept during spiritual exercises. Whoever weeps knows the purification, relief, and redemption that is connected with it. There is no need for visible tears, because a heart can cry even without them. And we look forward to the time after this valley of tears, when suffering is transformed into new life.

Many people suffer from violence, and this is difficult to deal with. Sometimes repressing memory is the only way to cope with the situation. Anyone who is traumatized should be prepared for what may follow. Without good guidance, the path of recovery becomes arduous, perhaps even dangerous. But when you are no longer overwhelmed by pain and tears, you have regained a large piece of inner freedom. The suffering inflicted on me loses its power and no longer dominates me.

No one seeks suffering or wants to suffer. Nonetheless, mature people can accept their own suffering and transform it. They have reconciled themselves with their fate: for example, by learning to live with an incurable illness. They have a depth and wisdom that healthy people often lack.

MEDITATION 1

Mark 14:1-9

¹ The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were to take place in two days' time. So the chief priests and the scribes were seeking a way to arrest him by treachery and put him to death. ² They said, "Not during the festival, for fear that there may be a riot among the people."

³ When he was in Bethany reclining at table in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil, costly genuine spikenard. She broke the alabaster jar and poured it on his head. ⁴ There were some who were indignant. "Why has there been this waste of perfumed oil? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than three hundred days' wages and the money given to the poor." They were infuriated with her. ⁶ Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them, but you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could. She has anticipated anointing my body for burial. ⁹ Amen, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

Comment

Jesus is a guest of Simon in Bethany, a few days before the great feast begins in Jerusalem. When suddenly a woman approaches Jesus and anoints his head, it becomes very quiet. All eyes are on Jesus.

To anoint someone's head means to sanctify him — to place him in God's proximity in a special way. Thus kings, prophets, and priests were anointed; but also the sick and the dead. Jesus lets it happen and rebukes those who scold the woman. They fall silent, highly irritated. What is wrong with Jesus? Didn't they work together tirelessly for the poor and marginalized in the past few years? Why is this no longer true?

Jesus knows that it is only a matter of time before the establishment turns against him by force. The woman seems to be the only one who understands what is really important now — and Jesus can accept it.

Anointing also involves touching, and here we see something seldom seen in the Bible. It is rarely told that Jesus lets someone touch him. Those who did include the woman who suffered from bleeding for years, the other woman who washes his feet with her tears, or Thomas, whom Jesus invites to put his hand into the stigmata. Otherwise it is always Jesus who acts and heals.

But now he seems tired. And the woman senses this. She does not waste unnecessary words, but simply gives Jesus what she can give: the benefit of a loving touch. This says more than a thousand words.

Suggestions

- First I prepare the scene for myself.
- Jesus has sorrow — how would I show him my love?
- Could I allow someone to waste money on me?
- Do I sometimes feel that a touch would be more comforting than words? Do I then dare to give this comfort and take someone in my arms in front of others?
- Every baptized person is anointed with Chrism oil as a sign that she or he has a share in Christ (which literally means the “anointed one”). I am anointed like Jesus to be priest, king, and prophet. What does this mean for me?

Film

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly – Le Scaphandre et le Papillon
France, USA 2007, 112 Minutes. Directed by Julian Schnabel

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