

Encouragement Encouragement

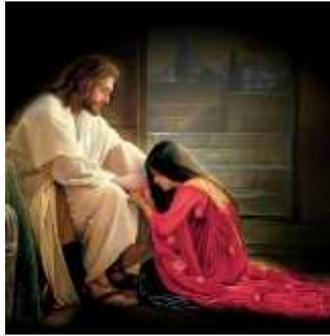
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Loving much...

'Much will be forgiven her for she has loved much! Much must have been forgiven her or she would not have shown such great love!' (Luke 7: 36-50)

Both of these statements are said about 'Mary' or the woman who washed Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair, crying so much that her tears fell gently on His feet, washing them with no towel at hand. She dried Jesus' feet with her hair – anointing them with costly oil. The truth of who she was we are not certain. Was she Mary of Magdala, once a prostitute, Mary of Bethany, sister to Martha and Lazarus, or just a hugely repentant woman?

What we do know is that she had incredible moral courage and strength, not to mention honesty and humility. To burst into a dinner held by 'notables' or anyone, by a woman, would have all gasping. To uncover her head, revealing her hair was even more shocking, but if she was a woman of ill repute, she would have been seen as tainted - to be shunned and rejected. Furthermore, Jesus, by allowing her to do this, would be considered part of her sin, so to speak, violated and unclean (as He was with lepers, and the woman with the issue of blood). It is a very moving scene and to be pondered over carefully and lovingly, because it teaches us many things.



The nature of love is that it gives. It is not restrained or calculated, it is often spontaneous. Judas, for all that he was a Disciple, Apostle, repeated the law and said Mary was wasteful. Judas who seemed to dip his fingers into the common pot, and betrays Jesus - condemns this woman for her generosity? This is an interesting paradox (John 12: 1-6).

Today, when love now almost has a bad name, associated not just with sexuality and lust, but with anything material that is sought after – love of cars, sport, clothes, books, and jewellery - indeed almost anything. It has become identified with liking, wanting and needing. It seems almost too easy to slip into that language... 'Oh I love that etc. etc.' Yet it is

to debase the very concept of love and its inherent selflessness and desire to please another human being, in whatever situation presents, and with no recompense. The woman risks 'everything' to show her gratitude to Jesus for both healing and forgiving her.

A 'lover' is one who places the object of his love as a priority. When we look carefully at what Jesus taught we see perfect examples of what it means to love. Jesus taught us to love one another as He loved us – and that takes us to the point of total surrender, to death on the Cross. Yes, love is costly and demanding. He told us that the love of God requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves – and how difficult that can be. We are full of 'self-love' and run away from anything that might hurt or injure us in any way. We defend our position adamantly and woe-betide anyone who threatens our position, even minutely. But Jesus tells us to love without reserve, as He loved us.

Mary's spontaneous action received derision yet Jesus recognised her true worth in that action, as well as attributing to it a prophetic note 'She anointed Me for My death'. There is a beautiful balance here: she who was shunned anointed the one who was sent and chosen. The Perfect one forgives the sinner: the sinner rejoices and is glad and throws caution to the wind. Surely we have a perfect example of abundant love from both? There is no sexual connotation but she was drawn to Jesus, yet respects His Kingship by anointing Him. He lets her because He sees the beauty in her soul. Perfect love casts out fear: she is not afraid because she knows His total goodness.

One outstanding feature of *Much loving* is that it is always self-giving, in the real sense of that word. What parent would not die rather than see harm to their beloved child? What husband or wife would not, if truly loving, give anything to help and succour their spouse? We see this self-giving in the lives of great men and women who have sacrificed their lives for others, either as martyrs, but also as teachers,

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"Loving others requires patience, tolerance, benevolence, three big virtues" Special Pastor

healers, supporters, servants of the poor, pastors - and simply do not give *not* loving another thought. Against all opposition they strive to give more and more of themselves. I am sure that we can all think of people like this, even in our own families.

How is this possible – you may ask – or even think its pie-in-the-sky, unrealistic and that it does not happen in the ‘real’ world... We see things in a way that our heart is disposed to see. If our love for others is sincere we will find goodness and love in others. Greatly hurt and wounded people find this very difficult to do, and therefore neither see that love in others, nor are capable of loving back. Perhaps that is why Jesus puts such great – greatest emphasis – on loving our neighbour, for if we wound others we make it difficult for them to give that love back to anyone and the fallen nature of mankind can take on a sinister perspective. If we have, after all, withdrawn out love from someone or refused to forgive them, we make it difficult for them to love back. We have a beautiful statement and lesson from Jesus. Jesus makes it clear that she, the woman, can love so extravagantly because she has been forgiven much, BUT most importantly, she knows it. She has opened herself up to receive that love and forgiveness. She loves because much has been changed in her. She is repentant and recognises how much her tears reflect her deepest feelings. Both Luke and John’s Gospel statements go hand in hand.

But a word of caution – *loving much*, not in a selfless way, can also be a cover for the very opposite of love – which is a clinging, demanding and possessive ‘love’ which is a long way away from what Jesus shows us.... Where there is this type of ‘love’ it can do great damage. We are bidden to love one another as we love ourselves. We would not choose to do actual harm to ourselves, and loving egotistically, for self-gain, is not what leads us to love purely.

It is not easy to love others in the same way we love ourselves, and it takes many years of learning for most people to do so. If we look at beautiful, long lasting marriages, we see this in action. Much surrender, much patience, tolerance, understanding and self-giving has gone into transforming a couple into one unit, where words seem superfluous and the true hospitality of living together is paramount. Respecting ourselves as God’s creatures, we can start to love others in the same way. The start of this love

is the recognition that He loves us all equally, **first**. If I am so loved, how can I not love others? If I have been forgiven much, how can I not forgive? If I have sinned, how can I not understand how others fall and not condemn and maybe help them by loving them? Should Simon the leper too, have offered hospitality, Jesus was generous to him, accepting his hospitality. Returning to the story, Jesus’ parting shot was “Your faith has saved you – go in peace”. Great love given brings great peace. We are loved.

Halina Holman

Pope Francis

“The heart of the human being aspires to great things, lofty values, deep friendships, ties that are strengthened rather than broken by the trials of life. The human being aspires to love and to be loved. This is our deepest aspiration: to love and be loved; and definitively.”

July 2019

Mary in the house of the leper Simon

No one will stop me, I will break the seals:

No one will restrain me,

I will pour oil over His tired feet:

You, Simon did not even offer water

You stand aghast,

No one comes to help me, No one brings a cloth or towel.

No matter, I have my hair,

A gift of God, whatever you may say about it.

And I will use my gifts; to help My Master

He will not despise me, I will break through.

Margaret Ives

Feasts in October

1st St. Thérèse of Lisieux, 2nd The Guardian Angels

4th St Francis of Assisi

5th St Faustyna

6th **Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary time**

7th **Our Lady of the Rosary**

9th **St John Henry Newman (Canonised on 15th)**

10th St Paulinus of York

12th St Wilfrid

13th **Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary time**

15th St Teresa of Avila

16th St Margaret Mary Alacoque,

St Hedwig

17th St Ignatius of Antioch

18th **St Luke, Evangelist**

19th St Paul of the Cross,

Ss Jogues, Brébeuf

20th **Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary time**

22nd St John Paul II

25th Six Welsh Martyrs and Companions

26th St Chad

27th **Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary time**

28th Ss Simon and Jude, Apostles

31st Bd. Dominic Cummins

