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Annunciation Parish, Shumway, Illinois
5 April 2009

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion (B)
At the Mass

There can be only two responses to the love of Jesus revealed to us in his Passion and Death: love or rejection. Some will see the beauty and truth in Jesus and will respond to him with love. Others will see only a condemnation of their lives and reject him.

Dear brothers and sisters, what is your response to his love? What is my response?

Saint Mark begins his account of the Lord's Passion by noting, "the chief priests and scribes were seeking a way to arrest [Jesus] by treachery" (Mark 14:1). This implies that they sought to act secretly, that they refused to confront Jesus personally; they refused to meet him and come to know him.

The Evangelist continues his account in the house of Simon the leper where Jesus is "reclining at table" (Mark 14:3). Whereas the chief priests and the scribes refused Jesus, Simon received him into his home and as a welcome guest; he wanted to know him and welcomed him into his life.

But this is no simple meal that was eaten in his house. The fact that they are "reclining at table" implies a more solemn occasion, a feast. As such, it is an atmosphere of great

joy and gladness, which is always present - even if hidden - in those who love Jesus.

A woman "with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil, costly genuine spikenard" entered the feast and "broke the alabaster jar and poured it on his head" (Mark 14:3). In contrast to the chief priests and scribes before her, and Judas Iscariot after her, this woman responds wisely and well to the love of Jesus; she offers her love - all that she has - in return.

The nard that she brought and poured over Jesus' head reflects an image from the Song of Songs: "While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance" (1:12). And later, "I gather my myrrh with my spice, I eat my honeycomb with my honey, I drink my wine with milk" (5:1). She recognized Jesus as the King who fulfilled the food of the Promised Land.

But why should she pour this nard on his head? She knew that both the king and high priest were anointed. The prophet Samuel, we are told,

took a vial of oil and poured it on [Saul's] head, and kissed him and said, "Has not the LORD anointed you to be prince over his people Israel? And you shall reign over the people of the LORD and you will save them from the hand of their enemies round about" (I Samuel 10:1).

When the woman poured the oil on his head, she recognized Jesus as the true King of Israel who would save his people not from the enemies in Philistia but from the true enemy of sin and death.

At the same time, she recognized Jesus as the true high priest. Before Aaron was ordained high priest, the Lord said to Moses, "you shall take the anointing oil, and pour it on his head and anoint him" (Exodus 29:7). The woman recognized Jesus as priest and victim, altar and sacrifice, who would soon give his life for the salvation of the world.

Before she poured this oil upon him, the woman "broke" the jar (Mark 14:3). In Greek, Mark says that she "shattered" the jar; she gave everything to Jesus with no possibility of taking it back. Is this not what Jesus did for us on the Cross? He gave himself entirely for us. Is this not what we should do for him?

Let each of us look upon his Cross, the sign of his love and mercy, and resolve to give ourselves freely and completely to him, that he might say of us as he said of her, "She has done what she could" (Mark 14:8). Amen.