

# *Divine Pedicures and Intimate Invitations*

Lent V – Year C

Isaiah 43:16-21



Psalm 126



Philippians 3:4b-14



John 12:1-8

*In today's gospel, what begins as a lovely dinner party among friends becomes something very different. Scripture says that Martha served. In all of the stories about Mary and Martha, I imagine Martha Stewart in the role of Martha.*

She's a woman of action. She is also usually depicted doing housework. If Martha is anything like the domestic diva who is named after her, the meal was probably elaborate, yet with a certain simple elegance.

But then, right in the middle of this tasteful meal, her sister Mary brings out a heavy jar of costly perfume and begins anointing Jesus' feet. She wipes his feet with her hair! This was anything but proper. Jewish women never unveiled their heads in public, much less allowed anyone to touch their hair.

Now, let me simply name the erotic elephant in the room: Mary's lavish act was extremely intimate and sensual. Now, I don't mean to embarrass you. Based on Judas' reaction, it embarrassed the other people at the dinner party, too. He scolded Mary for wasting money on perfume. But he and the other disciples, as well as

the others who were present knew that Jesus would not be with them forever. At least, Jesus had told them this repeatedly. The anointing was an act of love on Mary's part, for she knew her dear friend was about to endure suffering and death. She knew this because of the hours she spent sitting at the same feet she washed, listening to Him speak. She had been paying attention. And her response was this very intimate act of getting down on her hands and knees, rubbing oil over Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair. Jesus (and Mary) were the only unembarrassed people in the room. Jesus did nothing to stop her. He received her act of love. And he told Judas to leave her alone. "The poor you will always have with you," he said, "But you will not always have me."

What are we to make of this Scripture? Especially if you have short hair? This gospel shows us a Christ who allows someone to show their love for him. To adore him. To worship him without reserve. It is this lack of reservation, this reckless abandon that I find compelling.

Several days after Mary anoints his feet, we see Jesus interrupt a meal to wash the feet of his disciples. And they were embarrassed by the humility of his action. He removed his outer robe and tied a towel around his waist. Peter wouldn't have it. "You will never wash my feet." (Ironically, Peter later became the patron saint of feet.) Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." And then he washed Peter's feet.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention another Mary today. Today is the feast of the Annunciation - the day the Church celebrates another woman named Mary who was intimate with God. She carried the Son of God inside her for nine months. It doesn't get anymore intimate than that! Both Marys made themselves vulnerable so that they could physically express their love for God. Mary, Jesus'

mother risked losing her fiancée and could have faced the penalties of adultery. Mary in today's gospel was publicly berated for her extravagant act of love at the dinner party. But they both knew that their risky acts would be accepted by God. Because God can be trusted.

I went to college in Seattle. It was a Christian college that had mandatory chapel requirements when I was a student there. We had to go to 15 hours of chapel per semester. But, there was one easy way to rack up the chapel hours: by going on a retreat. By my senior year, spring semester, I was pretty desperate to get my chapel requirement out of the way. So I agreed to go to the retreat center. I brought a bag of books with me, figuring I could make the most of all the silent time by getting some schoolwork done. I had to leave the city pretty early—I think it was still dark—to get to the conference center. It was a beautiful morning, so I thought I'd sit for a bit and enjoy the morning air before hitting the books. I found a spot in the backyard with a huge lawn that stretched downhill and into the morning mist. I began to feel a little guilty about doing my homework at a place of prayer, so I began saying a quick prayer to assuage my guilt. Going through my usual litany of complaints and problems, I started to feel frustrated as I often did when I prayed. "Are you even listening, God?" I asked, "Are you even there?"

Then I heard a voice say, "Look up." And when I looked up I saw that some of the mist had lifted to reveal the sparkling blue water of Puget Sound. I had no idea that I had been sitting on an overlook. And I thought, maybe I had God's attention. Okay, quick, what do I want to ask God for? I closed my eyes I began to start talking at God. I had so much to say that I didn't know where to begin. So I looked up again and this time I saw that the clouds had evaporated to reveal not only Puget Sound, but the snowy peaks of the Olympic Mountain range, too.

God was revealing Godself to me and I began to understand that God is always present like those mountains and like that water. I just never paid enough attention to notice. But in that moment, I could discern the presence of God in everything I saw: in every blade of grass, in the wind, in the sunlight, even inside of me. And all I could do was sit there and simply soak up God's presence.

I would love to tell you that I often experience God like that, but I don't. Yet I began to realize that day that I can trust that God will show up. God will not leave me hanging. When we avail ourselves to Him, we come to realize that God has been waiting for us all along. This is a God who washes feet at dinner parties. This is a God who desires to be close to us.

We are about to experience an intimate encounter with God this morning in the Eucharist. We are about to receive Christ's body and Christ's blood. And when we receive the Eucharist, we are letting Christ into our bodies. We are letting Christ transform us from the inside out. And we do this very intimate act right in front of each other, like Mary did when she anointed Jesus' feet in the middle of a dinner party. And when we have experienced God in this way, when we participate in his passion by celebrating the Eucharist, we are then able to go into the world. We, having been nourished and renewed by our union with God, are finally able to respond to the needs of the poor, whom Jesus said would always be with us. Not only do we need to be intimately connected with God, the world needs us to be, too. So we can do the work God has given us to do.

God is patient. God is ready and waiting for us to look up and notice that God's been there all along, like the mountains or the Hudson River. God is present to receive our adoration, as embarrassing or inelegant as it may be.

God is at this table. Waiting, ready to intimately be with you. *Amen.*