

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Why did our Blessed Lady not go with the holy Women to the Sepulchre on Easter morning?

The silence of the Evangelists on this point seems to be an eloquent testimony to the delicate sympathy existing between Our Lady and the holy Women.

The latter whilst preparing the ointments on Friday evening and late on Saturday would leave the Mother of God to herself knowing like the friends of Job (ii, 13) that her grief was very great, too great for words of consolation. They also felt, as do the friends of bereaved families, that their efforts to do honour to the sacred body would be a real alleviation to her.

On Easter morning they would not suggest to the mourning Mother to join them in their errand, fearing that the fresh sight of the mangled body of her Son would but renew and aggravate her grief.

On her part our Blessed Lady, being probably the only firm believer in the Resurrection, would know that the errand would be useless, and therefore she would not offer to go with her friends. On the other hand she saw it was a consolation to them, and, as it turned out later, also pleasing to the risen Saviour. Out of humility she would not disclose her knowledge, but (as she had done in the case of Saint Joseph, Matt, i, 20), leave the revelation of God's secret to His Divine Providence.

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Is the anointing of Christ related in Luke vii, 36 ff, the same as that related in Matthew xxvi, 6 ff, Mark xiv, 3 ff and John xii, 1 ff?

Since Matt., Mark and John all relate an anointing of Christ by a woman before his Passion one may well be tempted to ask why Luke should be silent on the point. In the second place, we note that the host in both cases (Matt., Mark and John on the one hand, and Luke vii on the other) is named Simon. Again, in both there is mention of an alabaster jar of perfume, an anointing and a wiping with hair. The question asked above might therefore appear to demand an affirmative answer.

Nevertheless, the evidence against this view is overwhelming. The anointing in Luke vii occurs in the account of our Lord's Galilean ministry, long before his Passion. It would be most unlike St. Luke to insert here for no apparent reason the record of an incident which in fact occurred (on the supposition of identity), much later in a different part of the country. The motive of the anointing does not appear to be the same, nor do the circumstances coincide. In Luke vii the sinner comes in almost unobserved and scarcely tolerated. Her tears fall fast on to the Lord's feet thus doing duty for the water which the host should

have provided. Spontaneously she uses her hair to wipe them, for naturally she has no towel, not having foreseen this. Mary of Bethany on the other hand is an invited guest and evidently has the run of the house. At Bethany, there would be no dusty feet, and there are no tears. After the anointing the hair is used, very strangely, for wiping the feet. (Doubly strange, because hair is hardly suitable for removing ointment, and Mary could without difficulty have used a towel for the purpose.) There is not the slightest suggestion that Mary is or has been a sinner and that this is the moment of her conversion. Moreover, this would not agree with Luke x, 39, where Mary sits at our Lord's feet. On the hypothesis that Luke vii, 36 ff coincides with the Bethany supper, we should have to suppose that Mary had returned to a life of sin during the comparatively short time that elapsed between the event of Luke x, 39 and the Bethany supper. But this is not credible. Our Lord's words and the comments of others are quite different in each case. In Luke vii we have Simon's unspoken thoughts about the sinfulness of the woman and Christ's rebuke of him for his lack of charity and readiness to condemn; in the other is described the protest of Judas at the unnecessary waste of money, not at any sinfulness in the woman—and Christ's defence of her and the deed of piety; not any absolution from sin.

The fact that the host in each case is named Simon proves nothing. It was a common name. There are ten Simons in the New Testament. Indeed it might be argued that if Simon the Leper is Simon the Pharisee we have the very remarkable fact of a Pharisee entertaining Christ to dinner only a few days before his Passion, at a time when the Pharisees had sworn to do Him to death and when almost certainly no Pharisee could have professed an open friendship for Him; or even for Lazarus who was a fellow-guest and who was also marked out for death because he had recently been raised to life by Christ, John xii, 10.

The strange conduct of Mary of Bethany in wiping the ointment from Christ's feet with her hair, John xii, 3, has long been a problem to commentators. The explanation has been offered that, though the anointings are different, the woman is the same, and Mary's action at Bethany is explicable only on the assumption that she is lovingly recalling that earlier supper at which she had gained forgiveness of her sins. There are no tears on the second occasion for they cannot be summoned at will but Mary remembers her other actions and since there are no tears, she wipes off the ointment instead. The most that can be said for this is that it is a possible solution, but something approaching certitude may be claimed for the distinction of suppers.

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