

Thoughts for Holy Week

2021



This week's thoughts are centred around a family who were all friends of Jesus. Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, welcomed Jesus into their home, with Mary listening to his words and Martha offering hospitality.

Compiled by Rev. Wendy Sellers

Monday 29 March

The story of Lazarus is one we are all familiar with. It can be read in *John Chapter 11* and you might like to read that whole chapter through today. Lazarus is the man who died and was raised from the dead on the command of Jesus, foretelling a time in the near future when Jesus, too, would die and be raised at God's command.



On 2 February 2021, Pope Francis added a memorial to the siblings to the General Roman Calendar. This means their day, 29 July, must be observed throughout the Catholic Church.

There are a number of reasons for this elevation, but the chief reason is surely because Jesus loved them. They were bound to him by the mutual love which close friends have for one another.

Today, why not reflect on your own loving friendships. It may be that you spend some time recalling a friend from long ago. Perhaps it's a good day to contact a dear friend. It may be that you spend some time with Jesus, our Saviour and our Friend.

Dear Jesus,

We thank you for the gift of friendship.

We ask You to bless our friends.

*Help us to offer the hand of friendship
to those friends we have not yet met,
and to deepen the bonds of friendship
with those we already know and love.*

Amen

Tuesday 30 March

'Now, as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.' (Luke 10. 38-42)

Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus, is known for the fact that she prioritised listening to Jesus above her household duties. Hospitality was a sacred duty, especially when your visitor was a Rabbi and dear friend. Yet Mary goes against what is expected of the women of the house to instead listen to Jesus' words. As you read the poem, reflect on what that felt like: to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his words and his voice.

Mary, sister of Martha, at your feet for the first time

You came in search of rest
away from the road,
that bright, shadeless road,
where so many came,
and you gave so much.

You came and sat down
in the cool room,
the shutters pulled
against the heat,
and Mary sat, too,
and it was enough.
Just sat, quietly, at your feet,
her face turned up to
yours as she listened.
And you saw how the light
fell across her,
as if for the first time.

And this is what you want,
what you long for.
Not the elaborate
preparations we would make,
not ourselves swept and scrubbed to perfection,
our acts and our
thoughts impeccable in lifeless rows,
but to be, here in this light,
to be, here at your feet,

Andrea Skevington



Wednesday 31 March

'When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again.'" (John 11. 17-23)

Martha, it seems, was the practical sister, who in Luke 10 serves Jesus and his disciples when they visit. While Mary listens to the words of Jesus, Martha acts as hostess, and we get the impression she was quite fed up about it. Yet, it is Martha who, before Lazarus is raised, recognises Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. It seems Martha was listening all along.



Martha of Bethany

I admit I complained
Not just that one day but often
About the washing, the cooking
The clearing up after the men.
Lazarus the Lazy, I'd chide him.
Today I would give anything to go back.
To make him bread once more. To break bread with him.
To place his clothes in a neat pile on his bed, clean and
sunlight scented. An act of love.
Instead, I have dressed his body in clean cloth.
Herbs, oils and spices used not for cooking but to
prepare his dear dead self.
My heart cries out
"Lord, if you had been here,
My brother would not have died."

Maundy Thursday, 1 April

'When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept.' (John 11. 33-35)



Jesus Wept

It is, I believe, the shortest verse in the Bible. Jesus wept. He wept for his dead friend Lazarus. He wept for the suffering borne by his friends Mary and Martha. He wept because it seems he came too late and that this was even deliberate on his part. He wept because he loved, and because he had hurt them. He knew that he could, with a word, have taken the suffering away.

We do not know why suffering is part of our lives, yet it is. To be human is to suffer and Jesus, like us, endured pain and grief. Jesus, like us, had to watch his friends suffer and even die.

Know that when we suffer, God weeps. Know, deep in your heart, that there will come a time when God will call our name. "Unbind them", he will say. "Let them see my glory." Know that everything He does, He does for love.

Good Friday, 2 April

'Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.'
(Mark 15. 37, 40-41)



Mary, sister of Lazarus, at your feet a second time

She sits in the shuttered room, the room where her brother had laid, dying, dead, the messengers sent out, returning empty, with no reply, like prayers that bounce off ceilings or stick to the roof of the mouth, choking with sorrow.

When you stay by the Jordan, that shuttered room is where Mary stays. This is her shadowed valley, the dark forest of her path, foreshadowing yours, it is all foreshadowing you. The room where her brother had laid,

how can she ever leave it now?

But leave she did, at last, when you called for her, she came quickly, running, trailing darkness behind her weeping. Mary, once more at your feet, and when you saw her weeping, you wept, too.

You know us in our grief. You come to us, call to us. In our darkest, most shuttered places, your spirit moves, breaks with ours. Death lay heavy upon you, too, and all the sooner for this, what you do now, standing before that tomb.

For now, you who are Life, Word made warm and beating flesh, and weeping, call Lazarus out.

You, who are life, and will rise, call out one who is dead from the cold tomb. You watch as they run to free him from the graveclothes, pull darkness from him, calling in strange bewildered delight, and you see Mary's face as she sees now, her brother, who was dead, once more in light, astonished, seeing your glory, part of your glory, as she weeps again, is weeping again breathless with joy.

Andrea Skevington

Holy Saturday, 3 April

'This man (Joseph of Arimathea) went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.

On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.' (Luke 23. 52-56)



Lazarus in the tomb

Nothing
There is nothing
No dark nor light
Nor sound nor silence
Even no stench of death.
I lie, bound. No heartbeat, no flutter of breath in my chest.
It seems this is death
I had hoped for more.
A sense of moving on perhaps.
A glimpse of radiance.
It seems I am to wait
Here in the nothingness
Until a dear voice calls:
"Lazarus, come out."
I am to wait, until he unbinds me and sets me free.

Easter Sunday, 4 April

'Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.' (John 12. 1-3)

Mary, of Bethany, at your feet a third time

And, so, you come once more to Bethany,
and share a meal with Lazarus,
a resurrection feast,
foreshadowing, foreshining
all those kingdom feasts you told of:
wedding banquets with long tables
set wide with good things,
with room enough for all,
welcome at your table.

Now, in Bethany, the house is ablaze with light,
shutters and doors thrown open,
all wide open with joy unspeakable,
music, laughter, dancing, wild thanksgiving
for one who was dead is alive again.

And all night, while crowds pour in from Jerusalem,
the feast goes on, and on,
as Mary enters now, cheeks glistening with joy,
past her brother at your side, back from the grave.

She kneels at your feet again,
pours out extravagant nard,
scandalous anointing of your warm, living feet,
unbinds her hair and lets it flow like water
over them, wiping them in such reckless
and tender thanksgiving.

Fragrance fills the room, the house, the night,
as more people pour from Jerusalem to you,
to you, who comes to us in our weeping,
who shares our bread with us,
and brings us to such joy as this.

Andrea Skevington



*Jesus Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed, alleluia.*