

PRAYING HOLY WEEK 2020

WITH OUR FIVE SENSES



Outrage à Jesus Roi (Mocking of Jesus the King)
Musée d'art sacré contemporain, St Pierre de Chartreuse, France

Reflections inspired by the images of Arcabas, 'painter of the soul'

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(Jean Marie Pirot, 1926–2018). Digital reproductions available from contact@arcabas.com.

MONDAY ... SMELL

Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper; he was at dinner when a woman came in with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the ointment on his head. Some who were there said to one another indignantly, 'Why this waste of ointment? Ointment like this could have been sold for over three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor'; and they were angry with her. But Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. Why are you upsetting her? What she has done for me is one of the good works. You have the poor with you always, and you can be kind to them whenever you wish, but you will not always have me. She has done what was in her power to do: she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. I tell you solemnly, wherever throughout all the world the Good News is proclaimed, what she has done will be told also, in remembrance of her.'

Mark 14: 3-9

At the beginning of this Holy Week, I make sure to find a moment to spend with my Lord. I may find that I reach inner quiet simply by looking at the picture opposite. I let it speak to me, accepting, without judging, the feelings and thoughts it triggers within me.

When I am ready, I read through the text, perhaps several times.

In my imagination I place myself in this scene, either as an onlooker or as one of the characters.

Perhaps my attention is drawn to the guests at dinner.

As the smell of the nard reaches them, their indignation is aroused.

I listen to the exchange between the men and Jesus.

What does it tell me about both parties?

In what ways do I react in times of stress or difficulty?

What do I want to tell Jesus?

My focus may now turn to the woman and Jesus. I try and imagine how she feels as the fragrant nard touches Jesus's head.

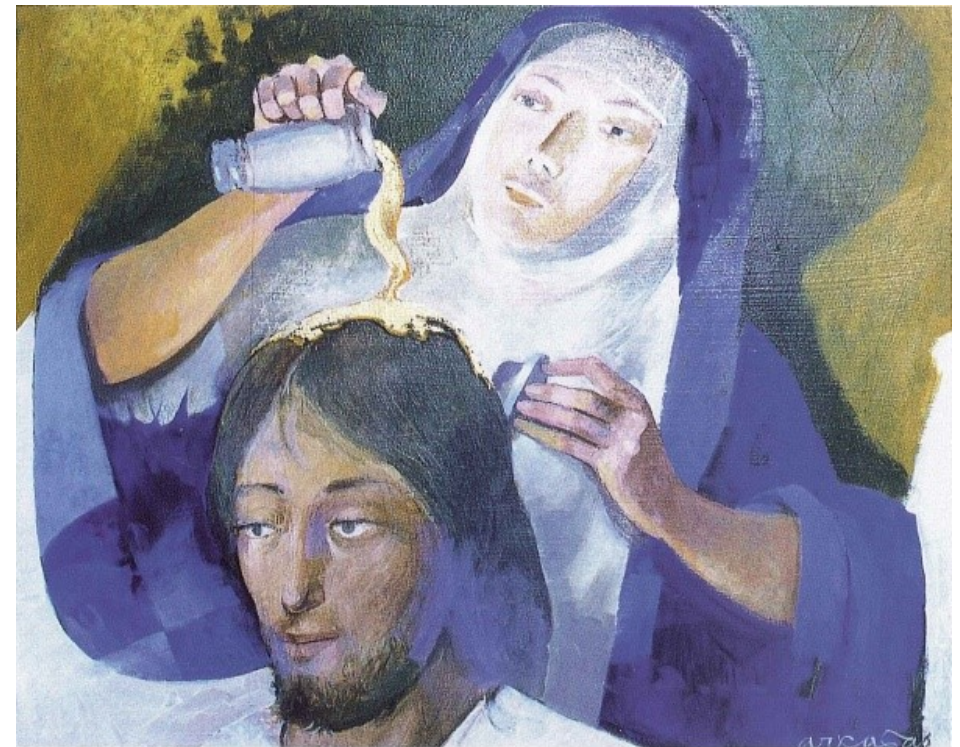
And what of Jesus himself? He knows, he understands, he accepts, he praises. As my prayer deepens, perhaps I take a deep breath: the smell of the ointment is all-pervading. Of what might it remind me?

I spend a few moments remembering times when smells have been important to me, perhaps stirring happy or not-so-happy memories.

Who are the people or the events that I associate with these smells?

I speak to the Lord about this, expressing my gratitude ... or my sorrow if need be.

In time I bring my prayer to a close, thanking the Lord for being with me.



L'onction de nard (The anointing with nard)

This image and those following are from the polyptych *Passion-Résurrection* (2003), now at Montaigu (Scherpenheuvel), Belgium.

TUESDAY ... TOUCH

The high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly for all the world to hear; I have always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple where all the Jews meet together: I have said nothing in secret. But why ask me? Ask my hearers what I taught: they know what I said.'

At these words, one of the guards standing by gave Jesus a slap in the face, saying, 'Is that the way to answer the high priest?' Jesus replied, 'If there is something wrong in what I said, point it out; but if there is no offence in it, why do you strike me?' John 18: 21-24

Whether it has been easy to find a few moments to pray today or not, I do not rush. I spend the time I need to come to a calm and relaxed frame of mind in the way I know works best for me.

When I am ready, I slowly read this Gospel text, and then look at the picture opposite. I may want to do this several times until I feel familiar with both text and image.

I reflect. What is my first, immediate reaction?

As I ponder further, I may notice the quiet, clear, matter-of-fact approach of Jesus, in contrast to the aggressive, violent tone and actions of the guard. My eyes may be drawn to the guard's hand in the picture. Jesus's cheek is red from its impact. How do I feel as I see this clear evidence of the forceful, humiliating slap?

There may have been times where I, too, have suffered violence at the hands of others. What was it like?

I tell the Lord about how I felt and how I dealt with the mark that remained, visible or not.

It could be that I myself have injured another person in anger or in fear, even if they were unable to defend themselves.

Reflecting on those times, I may hear the words of the Lord spoken to me:

'Why do you strike me' ?

If I feel able to, I express my sorrow.

Now I recall the times Jesus has touched others, not in anger or fear, but in love and compassion, using his hands to heal, not to hurt.

I spend as long as I need here, and rest in Jesus's comforting presence.

I reflect on the difference between the stinging pain of a slap and the healing sensation of a hand gently holding mine.

I may want to pray for all those people throughout the world who suffer physical violence at the hands of others, and who do not know the healing touch of friendly human contact.

When the time comes to conclude my prayer, I do not hurry.

Slowly, I give thanks to the Lord for the time spent together and for the comfort of having felt his loving touch.



La Gifle (The Slap)

WEDNESDAY ... HEARING

One of the Twelve, the man called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you prepared to give me if I hand him over to you?' They paid him thirty silver pieces, and from that moment Judas looked for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

Jesus was still speaking when Judas appeared, and with him a number of men armed with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. Now the traitor had arranged a sign with them. 'The one I kiss,' he had said, 'he is the man. Take him in charge'. So Judas went straight up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi', and kissed him. Jesus said to him, 'My friend, do what you are here for'. Then they came forward, seized Jesus and took him in charge. At that, one of the followers of Jesus grasped his sword and drew it; he struck out at the high priest's servant, and cut off his ear. Jesus then said, 'Put your sword back, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.'

Matthew 26: 14–15, 47–51

Before reading these extracts from St Matthew's Gospel, I try and shut out all noises around me, so I can be free to focus on what I hear today – the day when Judas betrays his friend.

Judas negotiates with the chief priests. Each silver coin falling in his purse rings like a death knell. How do I feel? What do I want to tell Jesus's friend?

I follow Judas when he meets Jesus. What is the atmosphere like?

I listen to their exchange, to the sound of Judas's kiss on Jesus' cheek.

What do I hear?

Jesus is calling Judas 'My friend ...'.

I pause and reflect. What is the quality of his voice?

Do I hear love, compassion, forgiveness, resignation ...?

The action gathers pace; the noise of the weapon drawn from its scabbard, the scream from the high priest's servant, Jesus's authoritative command.

How does this affect me?

I take some time to reflect on what I've just lived, on what I've heard.

I tell Jesus what is in my heart.



*Le Baiser de Judas (Judas's Kiss) and
Les trente deniers (The thirty silver pieces)*

HOLY THURSDAY ... TASTE

Now as they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples. 'Take it and eat'; he said, 'this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and when he had returned thanks he gave it to them. 'Drink all of you from this,' he said, 'for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. From now on, I tell you, I shall not drink wine until the day I drink the new wine with you in the kingdom of my Father.' Matthew 26: 26–29

Today we begin the Holy Triduum, three very special days when we reflect on the last moments of Christ on earth. So I make sure I am as receptive as I can be to accompany him as he walks freely to the cross.

I settle in the place where I like to pray, perhaps surrounded by my favourite objects. I take a deep breath. To help free my mind from everyday concerns, I may like to repeat, slowly, some familiar words from Psalm 33 (34):
'Taste and see that the Lord is good'.

Traditionally, Holy Thursday is the day when we pray the institution of the Eucharist during Jesus's last supper. The text is very familiar, and it may help if I pause after every phrase or so, and spend some time looking at the picture opposite. What strikes me? Where does my eye rest?

I take my time over this. Maybe initially, that is all I do.

Later, I come back to my prayer and ponder further.

I may want to imagine that I am with the disciples and Jesus is giving me some bread: *'Take it and eat it'*. What does it taste like?

Is it sweet or sour, bland or acidic, soft or crusty?

When Jesus offers me the cup to drink, what do I expect?

Do I keep the wine in my mouth and savour it, or do I swallow it quickly?

Maybe I am able to recall the first time I myself tasted the bread and wine of the Eucharist: how did I feel then?

For this last time, Jesus wants to eat with his friends and share his food. What is it like to be at his table?

I spend a few moments treasuring the opportunity.

Perhaps this triggers in my mind other important meals I have attended, maybe surrounded by family and friends. What do I remember about them: the atmosphere, the people, the taste of the food, how I felt ...?

I give thanks for these memories.

Eventually, I return to the Last Supper and the promise of the forgiveness of my sins through the spilling of Jesus's blood. Perhaps I look at the picture again, and reflect how the artist has shown the shedding of the Lord's blood.

I speak to Jesus about all this in my own words.

When I am ready, I conclude my prayer with a slow sign of the cross.



'Ceci est mon corps' ('This is my body')

GOOD FRIDAY ... SIGHT

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother'. And from that moment, the disciple made a place for her in his home.

John 19: 25–27

My journey through Holy Week is coming to a climax. From the cross Jesus says: 'It is accomplished'. Perhaps I reflect what I have done on previous Good Fridays: those when I was able to pray and spend a lot of time with Jesus ... and those when life intervened and prevented me from connecting. I tell the Lord what my hopes and desires are for today, and then slow down as much as I can, using the way which works best for me.

When I am ready, I look at this short text and at the images. What do I see?

I let my eyes roam around the words and the pictures, resting on the different characters, looking at their eyes, at the feelings their faces express.

I see Jesus hanging on the cross, looking at his mother and his friend John.

Where are the others? Where are his friends, his community?

I try to imagine how Jesus feels at their desertion.

But his eyes focus on his mother, faithful to the last, and on his closest friend, John.

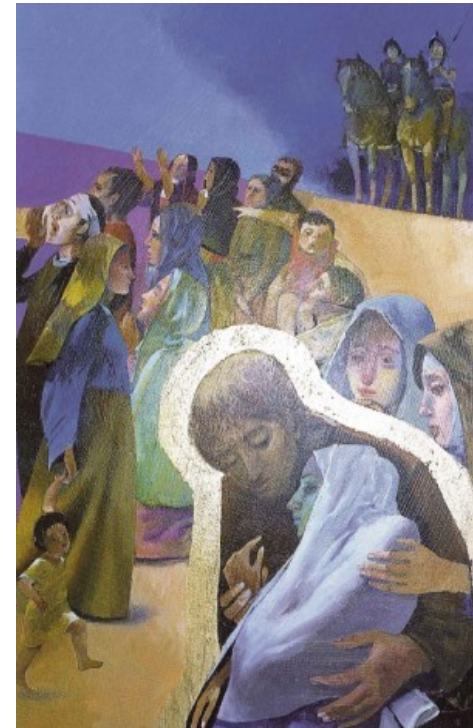
I look and ponder. Here is a new family group.

I tell the Lord what is in my heart. What do I need to be included in this new family? I ask Jesus and I listen.

I look at the picture of Jesus being taken down from the cross and at his mother. What feelings arise in me?

No parent ever wants to see their child die before them. I may want to pray for all those mothers and fathers who have lost a child.

When the time comes, I end my prayer *In the name of the Father ...*



Marie et Jean
(Mary and John)



Descente de croix (Descent from the cross)

HOLY SATURDAY

After the sabbath, and toward dawn on the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary went to visit the sepulchre. And all at once there was a violent earthquake, for the angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled away the stone and sat on it. His face was like lightning, his robe white as snow. The guards were so shaken, so frightened of him, that they were like dead men. But the angel spoke; and he said to the women, 'There is no need for you to be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said he would. Come and see the place where he lay.'

Matthew 28: 1-6

What is left to do now? All is dark; Jesus, my Lord, is crucified, dead and buried. Yet maybe I can look at the example of these women who still want to do their best for their friend. Just as Mary did in Bethany, they come to anoint the body, carrying jars of spices and ointment.

In the emptiness of today, I find a small place where I can pray. I read the text and look at the picture. Does it represent my idea of an angel? What is it about the angel that strikes me?

I hear and feel the earth tremor; I see the stone rolling away. I smell the musty empty tomb. Although I have the benefit of hindsight, I try to imagine what it must have been like for the women at the tomb entrance.

Maybe like them, I am struggling with a hopeless situation which seems impossible to resolve. I tell the Lord about it and ask for his assurance that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

I pray for all those who have lost hope, for whom no angel ever appears to reassure and give courage. May they, too, know the Good News this Easter:

'He has risen, as he said he would.'



Femmes myrrophores (Myrrh-bearing women)