

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Holy Saturday
April 20, 2019

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Saint John's Gospel wants us to know something about the absolute *fearlessness* of Our Lord Jesus during Holy Week. This fearlessness was contagious to some of the people around the Lord. It is important to recognize this fact as a modification of the pervasive mood created by the betrayal of Judas, the denial of Peter, and the cowardliness of the rest of the apostles. Against all that, today's gospel is an example of the courage of the Lord and how it was communicated to some who had experienced the Lord's Presence.

Six days before the Passover Jesus returned to Bethany. By this time the Pharisees had put a price on the Lord's head and admonished all the Jews to report His every move. Bethany is only two miles from Jerusalem. Yet here is the Lord Jesus seen publically and calmly walking right into the precincts of His enemies.

How did the villagers in Bethany respond to the Lord's Presence? We are told they made a supper in His honor. The banquet was not in the house of Lazarus and his sisters. The clue to this fact is that Lazarus was a *guest* at the table. So it seems the villagers, inspired by the courage of Jesus, responded by acting bravely. These people knew the Lord was a wanted man, condemned by the spiritual leaders. But they were made bold by the Lord's fearlessness, and so they showed their gratitude to Him for His blessings on Lazarus and their whole village. They gave him a village supper.

The sister of Lazarus, Mary of Bethany, also caught the infection from the brave Sacred Heart of Jesus. She responded by anointing the Lord's feet and wiping them with her hair. This is a venerable oriental sign of complete devotion. You remember a similar incident recorded by St Luke when a sinner woman had anointed the feet of Jesus after having wet them with her tears. But there are *no* tears in this present scene. Mary of Bethany is *not a sinner woman*. There is no remorse or shame in her devotion. Mary has intuitively perceived the immanence of a Divine act of self-sacrifice. Her response is to reach up to His heroism and boldly show in public her gratitude and love.

We pray that the Lord's Passion, showing His great love for us, will make us both brave and bold to share His life.