

Homily based on the readings from March 30, 2026 (Isaiah 42.1-7; John 12.1-11)

Quite a lot is going on in today's Gospel reading. The events take place "[s]ix days before Passover" – just as we are six days before Easter right now – which leads to a palpable sense of anticipation. Jesus is dining with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus – not long after he had raised Lazarus from the dead. This reunion must have been incredibly emotional – but also fraught with unexpected tension, as Lazarus himself had recently become the target of the chief priests' aggression. Many of Christ's disciples were present as well – including Judas, who was almost certainly plotting his ultimate act of betrayal. Nevertheless, the narrative focuses on an issue that might, on its own terms, seem almost inconsequential: whether it was appropriate for Mary to anoint the feet of Jesus with "costly perfumed oil," or whether that oil should have been sold to provide for the poor.

First of all, this conversation gives us some insight into Judas's character – that he was willing to defraud not only Jesus himself, but also the poor whom he was pretending to serve. More importantly, though, this episode illustrates a theological and a practical principle that is just as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago: nothing in this world can be more important than the worship of Jesus. This simple but profound truth has an *incalculable* impact on the way all of us are called to live out our lives.

One of the most obvious situations where this issue arises is the construction and decoration of our churches. Some people might see a beautiful building such as this one and ask – perhaps somewhat disingenuously – why Catholics spend our resources on building and adorning such majestic structures, rather than simply donating all our money to the poor. The first point to make, of course, is that these objectives are not mutually exclusive – over the centuries, no organization on the *planet* has contributed more, *both* to our common cultural heritage *and* to the care of the poor and the needy, than the

Catholic Church. On the other hand, it is obvious that our actions need to reflect our priorities. The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. Loving our neighbors as ourselves is still essential, but it will always come second – because it is a reflection of the first.

This issue also has major implications for the lives of individual Christians – in more than just a financial sense. All of us are caretakers of *numerous* resources that must be employed wisely – our time, our talents, our energy, our attention. Once again, the primary object of all our efforts must be Christ himself. If we focus solely on our fellow human beings – no matter how noble the intent – our faith will become hollow and lifeless. This recognition – that Jesus must *always* be the central figure in our lives – is the purpose of our Lenten journey, and the promise of our Easter joy.