

Holy Week Liturgy: Anointing at Bethany Ceremony

Set-up: As participants or retreatants enter, sandpit is set with a rose in a glass vase surrounded by a spray of other flowers; cedar sprig; grain of wheat, etc.; taper candles, incense sticks or a censor, a vial of anointing oil, and two small dishes set with cotton balls for the actual anointing. Presider for the evening can take the role of Jesus, but does not have to.

Solo recorder plays “*Now the green blade rises...*”

Reading (John 12: 26)

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains a single grain, but if it dies, it shall yield a rich harvest.

Reading: (Hafez)

*How did the rose ever open its heart and give to this world all of its beauty?
It felt the encouragement of light against its being—
otherwise, we all remain too frightened.*

Chant: “*Slowly blooms the rose within*”
(x 7, on Anglican rosaries)

Recitation by “Mary Magdalene” (Song of Songs: 2:1; 1:2; 6:3)

*I am the rose of Sharon,
I am the lily of the valley...
Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth;
truly more pleasing is he than wine.
I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.*

Chant: “*Slowly blooms the rose within*” (as before x7)

Recitation by “Jesus” (Song 4:12, 16; 5:1)

*A garden enclosed, my sister bride;
a garden enclosed; a fountain sealed...
a garden fountain,
a well of fresh water,*

*flowing from Lebanon.
Arise, north wind,
and come, south wind!*

*Blow upon my garden that its spices may flow.
I have come to my garden, my sister, bride,
I gather my myrrh with my spices.*

Chant: “*Slowly blooms the rose within*” (x 7)

Recitation by “Mary Magdalene” (Song 8: 6-7)

*Place me as a seal upon your heart,
For love is as strong as death,
its ardor as unyielding as the grave.
It burns like a blazing fire,
Like a mighty flame.
Many waters cannot quench love.
Rivers cannot wash it away.*

Chant: “*Slowly Blooms the Rose Within*” (x7)

Reading: (Hafez)

*How did the rose ever open its heart and to this world all of its beauty?
It felt the encouragement of light against its being—
otherwise, we all remain too frightened.*

Silence (10 minutes)

Chant: “*Place me as a Seal Upon your Heart*”

Recitation (from the Gospel of John, and a bit of Matthew). Presider lights incense and reads:

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where he had raised Lazarus the dead man to life. Now Martha waited on them. Lazarus sat at the table with Jesus. Then Mary took a pound of costly perfume with genuine nard and anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair. And the whole house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Then Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, the disciple who would betray Jesus, remarked, "This perfume could have been sold for over three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor."

But Jesus rebuked him saying, "Leave her alone. Was she not keeping it for the day of my burial? Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed all over the world, what she has done will be told in praise of her."

The small bowl bell is rung. As retreatants hum "Place me as a Seal You're your Heart," "Mary Magdalene" rises from her cushion, moves to sandpit, pours oil into bowl, and moves toward "Jesus." She anoints him as fully and spaciouly as possible, with the words:

*"Place me as a seal upon your heart,
For love is as strong as death."*

He then anoints her, with the same words:

*"Place me as a seal upon your heart,
For love is as strong as death."*

"Jesus" then moves to outer circle, and anoints the first person, using the same words. The anointing bowl is passed around the circle, each person anointing the other. "Mary Magdalene" returns to the sandpit, oil into the other bowl, and begins the same anointing in the inner circle.

When anointing has come full circle, "Mary Magdalene" and "Jesus" return bowls to sand pit.

Reading (from J. G. Bennett; "Resurrection")

Everyone who begins to study and know their own states is well aware that our experience is a constant dying and rebirth. We must not be frightened as we come to see this, although it really is a terrifying thing that we have no power to keep hold of our own life; that it has to be renewed or given back to us by something that does not come from ourselves.

But even when we do see the helplessness with which we fall into oblivion, at that moment when we are most trying to hold onto ourselves, we must learn to trust that there is something that calls us back, and will call us back. And if it calls us back from sleep at night, it will call us back from that other sleep into which we shall enter, the sleep of death.

Chant: "All shall be well" (Julian of Norwich, Songs of Presence chant)

Final Reading (from TS Eliot, “Little Gidding”)

*And all shall be well and
All manner of things shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.*

Large bell is struck three times.

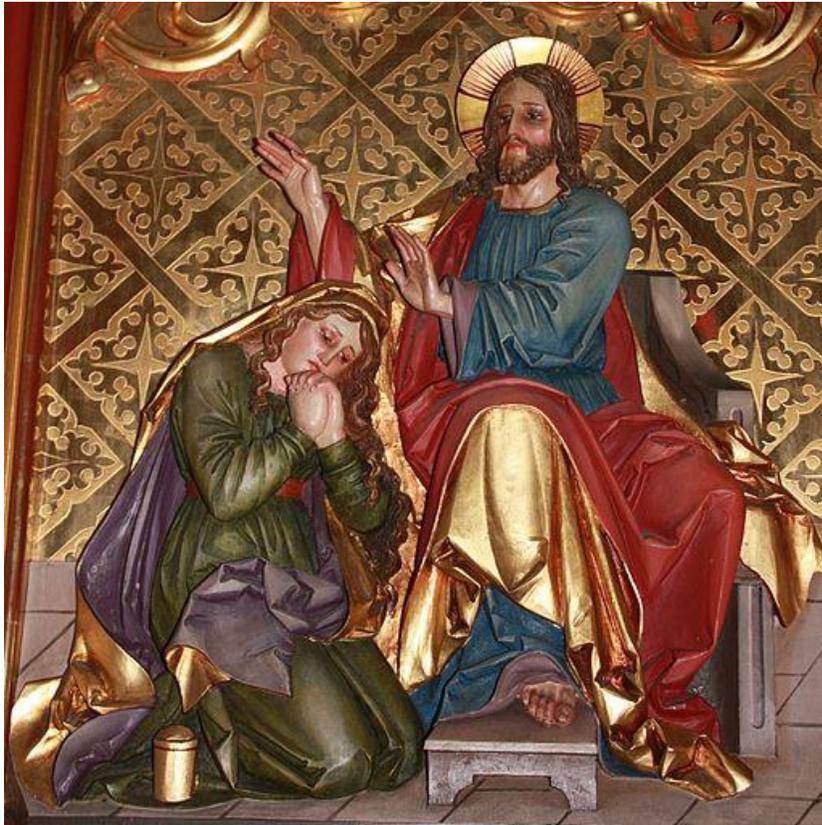


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