

# JESUS AND MARY AT THE CROSS

## JOHN 19:25-27

Meeting Jesus in the Gospels

### OPENING PRAYER

Dear God, Please draw us deeper into the relationships and communities you want us to be in, and breathe the Spirit of your Son into us now so that we can love one another as you have loved us, in the name of Jesus, Amen

### EXEGESIS

None of the other gospels have this story. By the time it happens, Jesus has been flogged, had a crown of thorns put on his head, been mocked, struck on the face, stripped of his clothes, and nailed to the cross (19:1-25). So he is at a point of maximum humiliation and pain, with v.28 following our passage adding his cry: 'I am thirsty.' In this situation, near the cross he 'saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her'. His mother is never named by John and in both her appearances in his Gospel- here at the end of his ministry and in 2:4 at the very beginning of his ministry (when he turns water into wine at a wedding in Cana)- she is simply called 'woman'. The beloved disciple, who is also never named, appears at critical moments – reclining next to Jesus at the last supper (13:23: 'lying in the bosom of Jesus' – cf. 1:18; 21:20), here at the crucifixion, at the empty tomb (20:2ff.) and at the conclusion of the Gospel (21:20-25).

Perhaps omitting names lets all of us identify with both of them. That would fit with one reading of this passage: that this points to the essence of Christian community. It springs from Jesus laying down his life for his friends (15:13). It is directly related to Jesus in mutual love. Jesus brings together diverse people, men and women, younger and older, blood relatives and others. Jesus shares his identity and his love to the uttermost with this community. New relationships are created. The disciple becomes the brother of Jesus, or even substitutes for him – 'Here is your son'; and the woman has her role and household transformed - 'Here is your mother'. They respond to his call to share life together.

This might be seen as the hidden church of ordinary living and loving that 'abides until I come' (21:22, 23), which is at the heart of the more public church associated with Peter's leadership and martyrdom (21:15-19). 'And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home': in this Gospel Jesus' 'hour' is the climactic moment, the time of his death when he loved 'his own... to the end' (13:1). His mother and beloved disciple are utterly 'his own', and as he dies in order to 'draw all people to myself' (12:32) this family-transcending family is thrown open to all.

### REFLECTION

When Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche communities where those with and without severe learning disabilities share life together, was asked about his reading of our passage, he said: 'Here Jesus, on the cross, is at a point of radical disability, and that is when he forms a new community. In L'Arche people who have been disappointments to their families, have none of the marks of success in our society (wealth, power, beauty, health, education, fame) and have been humiliated in many ways become the centre of a community of respect, celebration and love.' Perhaps the deepest secret of any really good family, group, community or society is that the 'little ones' are made central, and they and all the rest use their gifts to create a community like that.

A key ritual in the 150 L'Arche communities around the world is washing each other's feet, modelled on John 13:1-20. This can be seen as the sort of act of service, gentleness and love that Jesus wants us to imitate by improvising imaginatively upon it every day. Such acts can be seen as signs of the love Jesus showed by laying down his life, and as shapers of the type of community he desires.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What other readings of this passage can you offer?
2. Are there lessons from this passage for your attitude to home and family?
3. Have you found any communities where people with disabilities are not only welcome but central?
4. Imagine actions or activities you could take that might be signs of the Spirit of Jesus in the groups, organisations and communities in which you take part.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Give us wisdom to help shape our families, groups and other communities as you desire, and let us have the joy of sharing our lives with others in love. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Jean Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John* (London, Darton, Longman and Todd 2004)

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