

his peculiar little history was known by a number who had noticed him.

Before I had time to remove the vestments an old white-haired man tottered into the sacristy. "God forgive me, Father," he wept: "I was the one who unknowingly caused that boy's death. I was at the corner waiting for the car that Tuesday night. I only had a nickel with me, and it was so cold I dropped it into the snow. That boy came along and I asked him to look for it. He stopped and looked, but the car came so quick that there wasn't a minute, and I begged him to hurry. He slipped a coin into my hand and ran off in another direction. I thought it was my nickel until I got into the car, when I found it was a new quarter. I was terribly surprised, and ever since I could not get him out of my mind. I would have frozen to death if I had not got into the car that night, for it was bitter cold, and I walked slowly. To think that I should happen on his funeral Mass and learn that he gave up his little life for me! And the old man wept out loud.

"Yes," I said solemnly, "for my heart was deeply moved; he gave up his little life for you. A martyr only twelve years old!"—Rev. Richard W. Alexander.

THE STORY OF CHRIST

BY GIOVANNI PAPINI

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MARTHA AND MARY

Women also loved Jesus. He who had the form and flesh of a man, who left His mother and never had a wife, was surrounded all His life and after His death by the warmth of feminine tenderness. The chaste wanderer was loved by women as no man was ever loved, or ever can be loved again. The chaste man, who condemned adultery and fornication, had over women the inestimable prestige of innocence.

All women, who are not mere females, kneel before him who does not bow before them. The husband with all his legal love and authority, the satyr with all his mistresses, the eloquent adulterer, the bold ravisher, have not so much power over the spirit of women as he who loves them without touching them, he who saves them without asking for even a kiss as reward. Woman, slave of her body, of her weakness, her desire and of the desire of the male, is drawn to him who frees her, to him who cures her, to him who loves her and asks no more from her than a cup of water, a smile, a little silent attention.

Women loved Jesus. They stopped when they saw Him pass, they followed Him when they saw Him speaking to His friends, they drew near to the house where He had gone in, they brought their children to Him, they blessed Him loudly, they touched His garment to be cured of their ills, they were happy when they could serve Him. All of them might have cried out to Him, like the woman who raised her voice in the midst of the multitude: "Blessed is the womb that bare you, and the paps which thou hast sucked."

Many followed Him to death. Salome, mother of the Sons of Thunder; Mary, mother of James the less; Martha and Mary of Bethany.

They would have liked to be His sisters, His servants, His slaves; to serve Him, to set bread before Him, to pour Him wine, to wash His garments, to anoint His tired feet and His flowing hair. Some of them were fortunate enough to be allowed to follow Him, and knew the still greater good fortune of helping Him with their money. "And the twelve were with him. And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance." Women, in whom piety is a native gift of the heart before it is acquired through desire for perfection, were, as they have always been, more generous than men.

When He appears in the house of Lazarus, two women, the two sisters of the man brought back from death, seem distracted with joy. Martha rushes towards Him to see what He needs, if He wishes to wash, if He wishes to eat at once, and, bringing Him into the house, she leads Him to the couch that He may lie down, puts over Him a blanket lest He be cold, and runs with a pitcher to get fresh cool water. Then, on her return, she sets to work to prepare for the pilgrim a fine meal, much more abundant than the ordinary dinner of the family. With all haste she lights a great fire, goes to get fresh fish, new-laid eggs, figs and olives; she borrows from one neighbor a piece of new-killed lamb, from another a costly perfume, from another richer than she, a flowered dish. She pulls out from the linen-chest the newest table-cloth, and brings up from the wine-cellar the oldest wine. And while the wood snaps and sparkles in the fire and the water in the kettle begins to simmer, poor Martha, bustling, flushed, hurrying, sets the table, runs between the kneading-trough and the fire, glances at the waiting

Master, at the street to see if her brother is coming home, and at her sister, who is doing nothing at all.

For when Jesus passed the sill of their house, Mary fell into a sort of motionless ecstasy from which nothing could arouse her. She sees only Jesus, hears nothing but Jesus' voice. There is nothing else in the world for her at that moment. She cannot have enough of looking at Him, of listening to Him, of feeling Him there, living, close to her. If He glances at her, she is happy to be looked at; if He does not look at her, she fixes her eyes on Him; if He speaks, His words drop one by one into her heart, there to remain to her death; if He is silent, she draws from His silence a more direct revelation. And she is almost troubled by the bustling and stepping about of her sister. Why should Martha think that Jesus needs an elaborate dinner? Mary is seated at His feet and does not move even if Martha or Lazarus call her. She is at the service of Jesus, but in another way. She has given Him her soul, only her soul, but such a loving soul! And the work of her hands would be inopportune and superfluous. She is a contemplative soul, an adorer. She will take action only to cover the dead body of her God with perfumes. She would move quickly enough if He should call her to her all her life-long. But the rest, all this bustle of Martha, is only material activity which is no concern of hers.

Women loved Him and He requited this love with compassion. No woman who turned to Him was sent away disconsolate. The sorrow of the widow of Nain made Him sorrow, so that He brought to life her dead son; and the prayers of the Canaanite woman, although she was a foreigner to Him, wrought on Him to cure her daughter; the unknown woman which had a spirit of infirmity, eighteen years, and was bowed together and could in no wise lift herself, was cured, although it was on the Sabbath day and the rulers of the synagogue cried, "Sacrilege!" In the first part of His wanderings He cured Peter's wife's mother of fever and the Magdalen of evil spirits. He brought to life the daughter of Jairus, and cured that unknown woman who had suffered for twelve years from a bloody flux.

The learned men of His time had no esteem for women in spiritual matters. They tolerated their presence at the sacred festivals, but they never would have thought of teaching high and secret doctrines to any woman. The words of the Law says a rabbinical proverb of that time, "rather than teach them to a woman, burn them up!" Jesus on the other hand did not hesitate to speak to them of the highest mysteries. When He went alone to the well of Sichar, and the Samaritan woman who had five husbands came there, He did not hesitate to proclaim His message to her, although she was a woman and an enemy of His people. "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." His Disciples came up, and could not understand what the Master was doing. "And marvelled that he talked with the woman." They did not yet know that the Church of Christ would make a woman the link between the sons and the Son—the woman who unites in herself the two supreme possibilities of Woman: the Virgin Mother who suffered for us from the night in Bethlehem until the night of Golgotha.

WORDS WRITTEN ON THE SAND

On another occasion at Jerusalem, Jesus found Himself before a woman—the Adulteress. A hooting crowd pushed her forward. The woman hiding her face with her hands and with her hair, stood before Him, without speaking. Jesus had taught that wife and husband should be perfectly one, and He detested adultery. But He detested still more the cowardice of tale-bearers, the hounding by the merciless, the impudence of sinners pretending to set themselves up as judges of sin. Jesus could not but have understood what the Master was doing. "And marvelled that he talked with the woman." They did not yet know that the Church of Christ would make a woman the link between the sons and the Son—the woman who unites in herself the two supreme possibilities of Woman: the Virgin Mother who suffered for us from the night in Bethlehem until the night of Golgotha.

We are all of us guilty of the faults of our brothers. From the first to the last we are all daily accomplices, although too often unperceived. The Adulteress would not have betrayed her husband if he had not tempted her, if her husband had made himself better loved; the thief would not rob if

the rich man's heart were not so hard; the assassin would not kill if he had not been harshly treated; there would be no prostitutes if men knew how to mortify their wantonness. Only the innocents would have the right to judge; but on this earth there are innocents, and even if there were, their mercy would be stronger than justice itself.

Such thoughts had never occurred to those angry spies, but Christ's words troubled them. Every one of them thought of his own betrayals, his own secret and perhaps recent sins of the flesh. Every soul there was like a sewer which when the stone is raised exhales a fetid gust of nauseous vapor. The old men were the first to go. Then little by little, all the others, avoiding each other's eyes, scattered and dispersed. The open place was empty. Jesus had again stooped down to write upon the ground. The woman had heard the shuffling of the departing feet, and heard no longer any voice crying for her death, but she did not dare to raise her eyes because she knew that One alone had remained, the Innocent—the only one who had the right to throw against her the deadly stones. Jesus for the second time lifted Himself up and saw no one.

"Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?"

"No man, Lord."

"Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more."

And for the first time the Adulteress dared to look in the face of her liberator. She did not understand His words. "What she had done was evidently a sin in His eyes because He commanded her to 'sin no more'; and yet he had so acted that the others did not condemn her. And now He also did not wish to condemn her. What man was this so different from all the others, who hated sin but forgave the sinner? She would have wished to turn to Him with a question, to murmur a word of thanks, to reward Him at least with a smile, because her soul was weak and her lips beautiful. But Jesus had begun again to write on the ground of the court, His head lowered, and she saw only the silky waves of His hair shining in the sun, and His finger moving slowly over the sunlit earth.

THE SINNER

But no woman loved Him so much as the woman who anointed Him with nard and bathed Him with her tears in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Every one of us has seen that picture in imagination; the weeping woman with her hair falling over the feet of the Wanderer; and yet the true meaning of the episode is understood by very few, so greatly has it been disfigured by both the ordinary and the literary interpretations. The decadents of the last century, careful workmen in lascivious preciosity, who swarm to the scent of corruption like flies to filth and crows to carrion, have sought out in the Gospel those women who are redolent of sin. And they have made of such women their own, adorning them with the velvet of adjectives, the silk of verbs, the jewelry and precious stones of metaphors; the unknown repentant woman, named Mary Magdalene, the unknown adulteress of Jerusalem, Salome the dancer, the sinister Herodias.

The episode of this anointing has been profoundly misrepresented by such writers. It is simpler and infinitely more profound. The praise of Jesus for the woman who brought Him nard is not praise of carnal sin, or of common love as it is commonly understood by men.

This sinning woman who silently entered the house of Simon with her box of alabaster was no longer a sinner. She had seen Jesus, had known Him before that day. And she was no longer a woman for hire; she had heard Jesus speak, and was no longer the public woman, flesh on sale for masculine desires. She had heard the voice of Jesus, had listened to His words; His voice had troubled her, His words had shaken her. The woman who had belonged to every one had learned that there is a love more beautiful than lust, a poverty richer than clinking coins. When she came to the house of Simon she was not the woman she had been, the woman whom the men of the countryside had pointed out sneeringly, the woman whom the Pharisee knew and despised. Her soul was changed, all her life was changed. Now her flesh was chaste; her hand was pure; her lips no longer knew the bitter taste of rouge, her eyes had learned to weep. From now on, according to the promise of the King, she was ready to enter into the Kingdom.

Without taking all this for granted it is impossible to understand the story which follows. The sinning woman wished to reward her Saviour with a token of her gratitude. She took one of the most costly things left to her, a sealed box full of nard, perhaps the gift of a chance lover, thinking to anoint her King's head with this costly oil. Hers was an act of public gratitude. The sinning woman wished publicly to thank Him who had cleansed her soul, who had brought her heart to life, who had lifted her up out of shame, who had given her a hope more glorious than all joys. She went into the house with her box of alabaster clasped to her breast, timid and shrinking as a



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little girl on her first day of school, as a released prisoner in his first moment outside prison. She went in silently with her little box of perfume, raising her eyes for only a moment to see at a glance where Jesus was reclining. She went up to the couch, her knees trembling under her, her hands shaking, her delicate eyelids quivering, because she felt they were all looking at her, all those men's eyes were fixed on her staring at her beautiful awaying body, wondering what she was about to do.

She broke the seal of the little alabaster flask, and poured half the oil on the head of Jesus. The large drops shone on His hair like scattered gems. With loving hands she spread the transparent ointment on the curls and did not stay her hand till every hair was softened, silky and shining. The whole room was filled with the fragrance; every eye was fixed on her with astonishment.

The woman, still silent, took up the opened box and knelt by the feet of the Peace-bringer. She poured the remaining oil into her hand and gently, gently rubbed the right foot and the left with the loving care of a young mother who bathes her first child, for the first time. Then she could control herself no longer, she could restrain no longer the great burst of tenderness which filled her heart, made her throat ache and brought tears to her eyes. She would have liked to speak, to say that this was her thanks, her simple, pure, heartfelt thanks for the great help she had received, for the new light which had unsealed her eyes. But in such a moment, with all those men there, how could she find the right words, words worthy of the wonderful grace, worthy of Him? And besides, her lips trembled so that she could not pronounce two words together; her speech would have been only a stammering broken by sobs. Then a n't being able to speak with her lips, she spoke with her eyes; her tears fell down one by one, swift and hot on the feet of Jesus, like so many silent thank-offerings.

Weeping freed her heart of its oppression; the tears relaxed the tension. She saw and felt nothing now but an inexpressible delight which she had never known on her mother's knees or in men's arms; it ran through all her blood, made her tremble, shook her with its poignant joy, shook all her being in that supreme ecstasy in which joy is pain and sorrow a joy, in which pain and joy become one mighty emotion.

She wept over her past life, the miserable life of her vigil. She thought of her poor flesh sullied by men. She had been forced to have a smile for them all, she had been forced to offer her luxurious bed and her perfumed body to them all. With all of them she had been forced to pretend a pleasure she did not feel. She had been forced to show a smiling face to those whom she despised, to those whom she hated. She had slept beside the thief who had stolen the money to pay her. She had kissed the lips of the murderer and of the fugitive from justice; she had been forced to endure the acid breath and the repellent fancies of the drunkard. Never, on a kindly summer night

when the eastern sky is all a flashing splendor, had she known the welcoming kiss of a husband who had chosen her, virgin among virgins, that she should be one with him till death. She was outside the

community and the laws. She was cut off from her people. She was separated from them all. Women envied her and detested her; men desired her and defamed her.

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