

## 16<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (C)

Our scripture passage comes from the Gospel of Luke 10:38-42. It is the story of Jesus going to the home of Martha and Mary. This scene should be read in the context of the lawyer's question from last week (v. Lk 10:25) because it demonstrates what love of God looks like just as the Good Samaritan parable demonstrated what love of neighbor looks like. As this encounter with Mary and Martha unfolds, it becomes a teaching moment for all disciples about the need to stay focused in the midst of our busyness.

This story tells us that Martha was so busy doing things for Jesus that she actually ends up ignoring Jesus. When that happens relationships suffer. This is an important insight for us as disciples because it addresses how we relate to our families, friends, and co-workers. Jesus reminds Martha, and us, that only one thing is necessary when it comes to hospitality and that is to pay attention to the guest. Everything else we do for the guest is secondary. Sometimes we get our priorities out of balance and end up spending hours doing things for other people but not spending time with those people. Our deepest longing is for love and that is the one thing necessary. It is true without human relationships and it's also true in our relationship of faith.

- *How can people today end up working so much that they don't spend time with the ones they love (and for whom they are actually working)?*
- *What are some of the ways that you make time to just be with the people you love?*
- *What are some of the temptations that try to lure you away from time with your family/ spouse?*
- *What are some of the ways in which we find it easy to "do" religious tasks rather than spending time in the loving presence of God?*

Jesus doesn't say anything to Martha until she complains. The Lord allows her to do her works of service and intervenes only when she expresses anger and frustration. It is then that He can speak to her and refocus her heart by helping her see what is out of order. Martha's works of service should have been an expression of her love for Jesus; instead they became a source of anger, judgment, and hurt. What could have been a blessing for Martha (the opportunity to serve Jesus) became nothing more than a burden. Imagine how many people would have been honored to have Jesus visit their homes, but Martha lost sight of the honor and the opportunity to experience the Lord's wonderful presence. Sometimes that happens to us as well when we are motivated more by duty than by love. Think of how quickly the opportunity to attend a sporting event with your child can become the burden of an additional demand on your schedule. Also, think of how the opportunity to care for an ailing parent can become an imposition

on your personal freedom.

- What are some of the blessed opportunities in your life that could easily become burdens for you?
- How do you respond when you feel like you are overburdened with duties?
- What practices help to keep you joyful, grateful, and focused in the midst of very busy and burdensome situations?
- Have you ever prayed about feelings of being overburdened and what insights has the Lord given you?

When Martha complains, she reveals what happens to all of us when we lose our focus on the Lord's presence in our lives. As we listen to her list of comments we can readily understand how easily we experience these same errors in our faith. First, Martha accuses Jesus of not caring about her troubles. Oftentimes in the scriptures we hear similar cries of people in distress who accuse God of not caring. Second, Martha tells Jesus what the problem is as though He couldn't figure it out for Himself. Third, Martha assigns blame to someone else for her situation -it is obviously Mary's fault that Martha has ended up busy and distracted. Fourth, Martha tells the Lord what is the solution to the problem (like He couldn't figure that out either). Fifth, rather than listening to what Jesus has to say, Martha does all the talking: she interprets, accuses, assesses, and recommends without ever letting Jesus say a single word. Sometimes we can find ourselves praying like Martha. It can be easy for us to have feelings of self-pity and self-righteousness in the midst of great efforts. It can also be easy for us to complain to the Lord about what others aren't doing while reminding God of how much we are doing. When our prayer is more a monologue than a conversation then we have become a Martha who is more interested in telling Jesus what to do than listening to what Jesus wants us to do.

- *Which of the above erroneous attitudes affects you most regularly in your prayer?*
- *When do you pray more to listen rather than to speak?*
- *What do you think Martha should have said to Jesus?*

When Jesus speaks to Martha, notice how He has to call her name twice. In the scriptures, when a name is called twice it is often done in order to wake someone who has fallen asleep. By calling out "Martha, Martha!" Jesus is telling us that Martha has fallen asleep in her faith and that is what ultimately led her to lose focus. The Lord has to "wake her up" so she can once again have right relationship. Lots of things can cause us to fall asleep in our faith life. For some people, it is the routine of daily prayer or even the liturgy that becomes so ordinary that they stop reflecting on what they are doing. A good rule is this: our religious works probably don't mean much to God if they don't

mean much to us! Other people can fall asleep because of a fundamental disinterest in their faith life. When that happens they can perceive prayer as fruitless and stop spending time with the Lord.

This Gospel passage specifically says that it was "busyness" and the distractions of much serving that led Martha to fall asleep in her faith life. That means we can become so preoccupied by our tasks that we end up in an obsession with completing our duties. Sometimes people have to be awakened from such a state. Lastly, some people fall asleep in their faith due to simple carelessness and lack of discipline when it comes to observing simple religious practices (Sunday Mass attendance, daily prayers, regular Confession). By allowing these good and regular practices of faith to slowly deteriorate, people can actually find themselves in a non-practicing state of faith.

What have been some of the "wake up" moments in your faith life?

How does God "call your name" when He wants to get your attention?

What makes you fall asleep in your faith life?

What are indicators that help keep you from falling asleep in your faith?

One other aspect of this reading that should pique our interest is that Martha becomes overwhelmed with much "serving". The actual word that is used in Greek is *diaconia* and is also translated as "ministry". This passage, then, has a particular message for those who are involved in various ministries of the Church. One of the pitfalls of ministry is that a person can become preoccupied by what others aren't doing. Such an attitude, of comparison, and even competition, can be detrimental to the spiritual benefits offered through works of ministry. The risk of being overwhelmed with much activity is also a reminder that better ministry doesn't necessarily mean more ministry. Sometimes it is the faithful and responsible task of the Church to discern which ministries are important and which ones are not. Since we are limited in our human abilities, we have an obligation to use our energies wisely and efficiently in order to accomplish the tasks entrusted to us. In order to do something well, we will inevitably have to say "no" to doing everything.

- *How can people become overburdened by being involved in ministries in our faith community?*
- *How can we best discern what ministries are essential to our mission and which ministries are not essential to our mission?*
- *When have you seen organizations attempt to multiply their efforts rather than to discern their best efforts and what has been the result?*

The final comment about this passage concerns the statement of Jesus regarding Mary having chosen the "better part". Scripture scholars have debated what that comment means. Most believe that it is a reference to Mary's decision to become a disciple of Jesus (she "sat at his feet" and "listened to his word"-all references to discipleship). Mary had to leave behind her social obligations to be in the kitchen preparing food for

the guest so that she could be with the Lord. Others looked down on her for ignoring these duties customarily assigned to women. Mary had to enter the room with Jesus and His disciples and share their company—something not permitted in the time of Jesus. In all of these actions Mary has demonstrated a courageous willingness to choose Jesus rather than be trapped by the social expectations of her time. That is the "better part". She may have offended some, but she pleased the Lord. Jesus will not interrupt such a commitment of faith and discipleship despite the complaints of those around Him. He sees Mary as an example for others to follow. In addition, the development of Christian spirituality attests that the figures of Martha and Mary, despite their obvious differences in attitude and disposition, have also become the ideal for what we call in the Church "contemplation" and "action." The integration of Mary (contemplation) and Martha (action) is for a true disciple the perfect balance in the service to the Lord.

- *What social expectations do people have to leave behind to be a disciple of Jesus today?*
- *Mary's decision for discipleship did not bring about harmony in the household. How can a person's radical decision for discipleship today end up causing disharmony among family and friends?*
- *Jesus had to intervene to defend Mary's decision for discipleship; how does the Lord speak up today to defend and esteem decisions of discipleship?*