

Homily OT 16 – (Year C) – July 21, 2019

GN 18:1-10A; PS 15:2-3, 3-4, 5; COL 1:24-28; LK 10:38-42

You may have heard the term “**armchair quarterback**” before without knowing what it actually means. **But** before defining that term here, let’s take a look at the first part of **today’s Gospel** passage:

Jesus entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary [who] sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.” (Lk 10:38-40)

We know that Jesus gently admonished Martha during this visit. Because of that, we can be quick to **criticize** and **condemn** her—while missing the point that *we...are...Martha...* more often than we **realize**...or, if we **do** realize it...more often than we care to **admit**.

Now...an “*armchair quarterback*” is “**someone who doesn’t participate in [a situation] but still makes judgments about it**”. The trap in “*armchair quarterbacking*” *this particular Gospel encounter* is that we **deceive** ourselves if we don’t think we often behave in the *very same way* as Martha—even if we don’t do it, **specifically**, in the context of **cooking a meal** or **providing hospitality**. The **context** may be different, but our **behaviors and attitudes** are quite often identical to Martha’s.

Here’s a very common example:

A **modern-day Catholic** goes through all the **motions** and keeps all the **rules strictly**—just like **Martha strictly** kept the **social rules** of her time for providing **hospitality** to a guest. This Catholic person does what they’re “**supposed**” to do and then **gets upset with Jesus** for not **rewarding** them in the way **they** think they deserve for keeping the rules. In **our day**, it can sound something like this:

“I pray... I go to Mass... I tithe... I follow all the rules... and do everything I’m supposed to do... and Jesus *still* doesn’t answer my prayers! Why bother? He doesn’t care.”

We can learn a great deal about why such an attitude is toxic by **contrasting Abraham’s actions in our 1st Reading with Martha’s actions in our Gospel passage**. The contrast helps us understand why Jesus called **sitting at his feet** and **listening “*the better part*”** (cf. Lk 10:42).

In our **1st Reading** God appeared to Abraham. Now, before we consider the important aspects of **Abraham’s approach to hospitality**, let’s notice some important things about **God** here in the very **first Book of the Bible**.

The LORD appeared to Abraham by the terebinth of Mamre, as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot. Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and bowing to the ground, he said: “Sir, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest under the tree. Now that you have come to your servant, let me bring you a little food, that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way.” “Very well,” they replied, “do as you have said.” (Gen 18:1-5)

Here we read that **“the LORD appeared to Abraham”** yet, when Abraham looked up, **“he saw three men”**. He called them **“Sir”** (not **“gentlemen”**) ...and then spoke of them **“refresh[ing] yourselves”**. A rather **strange mix of singular and plural** in reference to **God**...isn’t it?

Now, going back **17 chapters in the Book of Genesis**—when God was about to create man—he said:

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...” (Gen 1:26).

If God is talking to **himself**, then why did he say **“us”** and **“our”**?

Either God is *Gollum* from the **Lord of the Rings**, or **God is both singular and plural at the same time**. In other words, we have here the **first Scriptural intimations of God as a Trinity**—one God in three Persons—even though many centuries would pass before the Catholic Church formally defined God as Triune.

Authentic Christians believe and profess the Trinity even though the word “Trinity” never appears in the Bible. The very acceptance of God as a Trinity by non-Catholic Christians is, then, an **implicit acknowledgement of** the Catholic Church’s God-given **authority to interpret Scripture**.

The Protestant affirmation of *God as Trinity* also **debunks Sola Scriptura**—the “*scripture alone*” doctrine of the Protestants—because devout Protestants embrace a **revealed truth about God** that is not **explicitly mentioned** in the very scriptures that they claim **must say things explicitly in order for them to be true**. Now, I’m not slamming **Protestants** here, but merely pointing out the **incoherence** of a **foundational doctrine of Protestantism**.

Now, let’s return to our **comparison of Abraham and Martha** on the question of *servng the Lord*. Whereas **Martha just sprang into action and started serving** Jesus; *Abraham asked* God ahead of time if the *way* he—Abraham—**planned** to serve the Lord, was **pleasing** to the Lord.

There’s a modern-day version of the “**Abraham method of hospitality**” that I **really appreciate**. It’s when I visit someone’s home and they *ask* me if I would *like* something to eat or drink—**and allow me to accept or decline**—rather than just **servng** me something to eat or drink and then **being offended if I don’t eat or drink it all**.

I do, of course, recognize that there are deep **cultural** and **social** dynamics at work in such acts of hospitality, but I **nevertheless** appreciate the courtesy of being **asked** rather than being *expected* to do something, and **then being made to feel uncomfortable** for not doing what the *host* expected.

We see this in spades with Martha:

Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.” (Lk 10:40)

Martha not only complained about her **sister’s** behavior, she also **accused Jesus** of **indifference**...and then **told him what to do!**

Here’s the bottom line:

Abraham **PRO**-posed...Martha **IM**-posed and Mary **RE**-posed.

And Jesus said that Mary’s decision to **repose**—to **sit at his feet and listen**—was *“the better part”*. It’s the difference between listening to Jesus and **asking him** what **he** wants, versus imposing what **we** want on him and then **resenting** him for not bowing to our will!

There’s another important consideration for us today—especially in **our world dominated by smart screens**. In the **New American Bible** translation of today’s Gospel passage—the translation used for the **Catholic Lectionary**—Martha is described as being *“burdened with much serving”*.

The **Revised Standard Version—Catholic Edition Bible** translation of this exact same verse says that Martha was *“distracted with much serving”*.

When I gave up **Facebook** and **Twitter** several years ago, I discovered that being free from social media made me **smarter** and helped me to **pray better**.

Why?

Because the **smart phone**, in **general**...and **social media**, in *particular*, **train** a person to be *constantly distracted*—to be **unable to concentrate** for more than

a few seconds without needing another *distraction*—another **text**, another **email**, another *electronic affirmation*.

Constant use of the **smartphone** and **social media** makes it nearly impossible to get the brain to focus on anything of **substance** for any **extended period of time**...including *prayer*.

In a similar vein, **constant activity** also makes it **difficult** if not *impossible* to **hear the Lord's voice**. I feel particularly sorry for kids these days whose parents so overload their kids' calendars with **sports** and **other extracurricular activities** that the kids never get a chance to just be *kids*...never get a chance to just **play**...let alone to *pray*.

This excessive activity trap even applies to **working for God**. For example, when people tell me they **missed Sunday Mass** because they were **working a parish event** or **attending a Catholic conference**, I just stare at them...**dumbfounded**.

What good is it, after all, to know **about** God or to **convince yourself** you're **serving him**...but then not *spend time with him at Mass... on his day...Sunday?*

In the **Gospel of Luke**, Jesus said:

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? Every one who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep, and laid the foundation upon rock; and when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house, and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But he who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation; against which the stream broke, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.” (Lk 6:46-49)

Any activity—even a *Catholic* activity—that keeps us from **sitting at the Lords’ feet at Sunday Mass and listening to him** is worthy of the same disdain as Martha’s **self-serving service** to Jesus.

In our **2nd Reading**, St. Paul wrote to the **Colossians** of...

...God’s stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the word of God, the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past. But now it has been manifested to his holy ones... (Col 1:25-26)

How is the **hidden mystery of God** manifested to his **holy ones**?

By listening to the *still small voice* (cf. 1 Kg 19:12) of God, spoken in the **quiet intimacy** of our hearts—which we will only **hear** if we choose the *“better part”* and resist the temptation **do things our way**...and then expect the **Lord to conform**.

Abraham **served** the Lord **according to the Lord’s desires**. He knew what to do because he first asked the Lord what he wanted of him. And to his great surprise, God gave **him** an **even greater gift**. A **child**...a **son**...an *heir* through which **God’s promise** to him to make him a great nation would be **fulfilled**.

If we want to hear God’s voice...if we want to receive his blessings...then, we have to **stop, sit and listen** to him, most *especially* in his **Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament**—during **Sunday Mass**—and as often as possible at other times during the week.

If we habitually choose *“the better part”*, then God will give us the **best part**—**the fulfillment of the deepest desire of our own heart**—a **unique, tailor-made desire** that *he* put there in the first place—and the fulfillment of which will always bring us the **greatest joy**.