

Homily - Year 16 C - July 21, 2019

The main thing is to know the main thing and to keep the main thing the main thing. Obviously, quite a few words, perhaps grammatically and stylistically poor, but words that get to the heart of the matter. What is really important?

At first glance our gospel may sound like a story of sibling rivalry, a type of story which may be familiar to some. Two sisters arguing, probably over the same issues that they have argued over in the past, but this time, they ask an outsider to settle the dispute. Personally, I would probably have told Martha to get a grip, but obviously Jesus takes a different tack.

At first glance, too, especially in comparison with the first reading in which Abraham offers an abundance of hospitality to the strangers, the lesson may seem to teach that we must provide hospitality especially for the stranger. The obligation to provide hospitality is true, but does not get to the crux of the issues at hand.

From the very beginning of the Church, there has been an ongoing and continuing discussion about which is more important a spiritual, prayerful relationship with Jesus or active involvement with the needs of God's people through service to one another. That controversy is being played out in the gospel. Some would argue that, because of this gospel passage, the contemplative aspect of our faith is more important than the active components of our tradition.

The truth is that Martha and Mary are both doing the same thing. They are both devoted to Jesus and both are serving him. But why did Jesus say to Martha: "Mary has chosen the better part?"

Well, perhaps the first reason is that Martha had forgotten why she was doing what she was doing. We could easily say that Martha was not focused on her guests, but was focused on the tasks. What is up for debate is not what she was doing, but rather the why or how she is doing it.

That can easily happen to anyone. We get so involved in what we are doing that the "why" gets forgotten. Forgetting can happen in our personal lives, in our relations with others, in our work habits, and even when we do good deeds.

There is a big difference between doing something because someone says I have to and doing the same deed because we are trying to imitate Jesus. The same deed is done. The motivation is different. That is why there is a big difference between church sponsored social activity and social activity sponsored by others. Our activities are always motivated by love of God, by the Gospel message, and by our desire to imitate Christ.

While others may do similar deeds, the motivations, although worthy, are different.

But there is something even more than doing something for the right reason. It goes back to motivation. In a word, what energizes you? what makes you want to get up in the morning? Martha was worn down by her good deeds. She was not being energized by them.

So, when Jesus admonishes Martha, he is really telling her to make sure that the good she is doing is done for the right reason and that this activity, rather than making her angry or emotionally drained, should energize her to do even more.

The better part is always to focus on Jesus whether at prayer or in service to one another. The better part, the focus is always keeping the main thing the main thing.