

**16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Homily Given By: Deacon John Halloran**  
**July 21, 2019**

(Genesis 18: 1-10)

(Colossians 1: 24-28)

(Luke 10: 38-42)

We might ask Jesus why He criticized Martha's concern for service just after He told the parable about the generous Samaritan. The traditional response suggests that Jesus was indicating the superiority of the contemplative life over the active, but He did not say that and His life itself didn't give witness to it. Jesus lived a very active life, moving from town to town, being a thorn in the side to Pharisees, eating with anyone who invited Him, and often saying provocative things while at table. Matthew, Mark and Luke also portray Him escaping to pray alone, but even when He tried to escape for time with the disciples, He abandoned their retreat time to respond to the crowds that sought them out. How does His lifestyle help us understand His conversation with Martha?

Martha wanted Jesus to tell her sister to get to work, but Jesus says nothing to Mary. Instead, He notes how harried Martha is. When Jesus sent His disciples out on a mission, He told them to share their peace, to stay with anyone who received them, and to eat whatever was served. Martha invited Jesus, but quickly became "burdened with much serving". The one thing Martha lacked was the ability to receive His peace — and that tranquility is what Mary seemed to be soaking up at His feet.

Jesus had accepted Martha's invitation, and it seemed that what He wanted in a meal from her was *real presence*, the one thing she was too busy to give. Faith tells us that Christ is present to us in Word and in the Sacraments. Today's Gospel reminds us that Christ's presence means little if we are too busy to soak it in. We too are called to **real** presence, in our prayers and with everyone we meet.

According to Jesus' instructions to missionaries, when someone received them, they were to share their peace, accept the hospitality, and stay with their hosts until it was time to leave the village. So far, that seems to be what happened in Martha's home. The tension of this story has nothing to do with the women's failure to play their prescribed social roles. The problem is that Martha feels overburdened with her serving. When she turns to Jesus, He tells her that she is too worried about "many things". Instead of the many things Martha is concerned about, Jesus says there is only one thing necessary, and Mary has chosen "the better part" that He will not take away from her.

The tension portrayed in this story has not disappeared. Some disciples strive to attend to all the details: the hungry need food and the refugees need shelter. At the same time, the tasks of *diakonia*, the constant commitment to respond to the needs of others, can become so burdensome that we lose touch with Christ and the Gospel for whom we started it all.

There is no single, correct interpretation of the story of Martha and Mary. It seems that Luke sandwiched it between the story of the generous Samaritan and Jesus' teaching on prayer, to indicate that the tension itself is important. Martha and Mary both chose the good, but there can be too much of a good thing. Christian disciples must continually seek balance.

This Gospel story does not tell us what happened next. Did Martha see Jesus' response to her complaint as an invitation to sit down and relax? Or did anyone get up to help Martha? Or maybe, thanks to both of their acts of hospitality, they all sat down to a hearty, delicious meal and engaged in truly transformational conversation.

When I was a child, being Catholic was relatively simple. We said grace before every meal and our prayers before going to bed each night. We went to Confession and Sunday Mass as a family so that we could receive Communion. That was being a good Catholic.

Being Catholic has changed over the last 50 years, to include a faith expressed by active service to the teachings of Jesus Christ. We are asked to go out into the world in ways we never were before. We are **not** asked to do more than we can handle; as Jesus said, "... my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

We really must ask ourselves, *"Am I more like Martha who busied herself with 'the little stuff in life', or like Mary who made herself present to the Lord? How can I integrate qualities of both Martha and Mary into my own spiritual life?"*