

Homily For the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year C

St. Peter's Sunday 8:99 AM Mass - July 21, 2019

Genesis 18:1-10 "Abraham set the meal before them and stood by them while they ate."

Psalms 15 "Whoever walks blamelessly and does what is right ... shall never be moved."

Colossians 1:24-28 "I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of the Church."

Luke 10:38-42 "Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from her."

The One Thing

Introduction

Sibling rivalry. Most brothers and sisters fight, at least some of the time. It can get pretty vicious, but it can also be pretty funny when you look back. One man tells how his two older brothers intentionally taught him the alphabet incorrectly. Before he started school, he learned: A,B,C,D,R,F,K. He said he had to be reprogrammed when he went to kindergarten. A woman remembers getting stuck in the mud on her way home from school. Her sister couldn't pull her out so went to get help. An hour later in the rain, she stepped out of her boots and walked home barefoot, to find her sister watching TV. She had totally forgotten her. I have stories like that too, but you might meet my brothers some day.

Martha

The reason I can picture Martha and Mary is that Martha says the exact same thing that every hard done by sibling always says when it comes to doing chores around the house. It's not fair! Make her do her share. Or, in this case: "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me." Martha is not whining to her mother or father but to their guest, Jesus, attempting to get a ruling in her favour. Parents have to have great wisdom in sorting out these kinds of disputes.

And what **does** Jesus rule? Remember that he has a great affection for both of these women, and their brother Lazarus. Recall when Lazarus died and how he shed tears before raising him.

To Martha he says: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things." Jesus points out her anxiety. She is in the presence of the one who is peace itself but she is not at peace. Yet, what is Martha supposed to do? Let Jesus go hungry? Surely it's the right thing to get to work and prepare something for him out of respect and hospitality? In another place in Sacred Scripture, it says that Jesus humbled himself and took on human nature. That means he got tired and hungry and thirsty, and needed those needs met. Martha didn't do something wrong. She was serving the physical needs of their guest, who is divine, but also human. Jesus' response tells us that what she is doing is not the problem, but rather her distracted state.

Mary

While Martha was preoccupied with hospitality, Mary gave her full attention to the guest himself. She sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. That's the posture of a disciple before the master. And our Lord says about her, Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.

So, Jesus is not going to take Martha's side. But we might ask, is he taking Mary's side against Martha? Too many times, someone will say, Oh you are such a Martha, as if it is a negative quality. But, I have left out the key element of what Jesus says. The Lord answered her, "There is need of only one thing." Whatever that one thing is, Mary is the one doing it.

St. Augustine puts it like this: Mary preferred to find her meal in what the Lord was saying. Even though she did kind of desert her sister, she was feasting while Martha prepared the food.

Integration of the Two Ways

Martha signifies the active life as she busily labours to honour Christ through her work. Mary exemplifies the contemplative life as she sits attentively to listen and learn from Christ. While both activities are essential to Christian living, the second one is greater than the first because, in heaven, all that activity stops, while contemplating and adoring and worshipping God continues and even reaches a kind of perfection.

In the world, good actions and contemplation are not opposite ways of practising the Christian faith. They are different, of course, and both are needed. There was a Canadian priest who told the story of his own life. As he got more and more involved in his priestly duties, very slowly he prayed less and less. Everything he did was service to his congregation and to others. That loss of prayer was just a very little bit at first, but gradually he heard himself making little excuses as he would fall in to bed exhausted after a long day. He would say, God knows that I have done everything for his own people today. He would repeat to himself what he heard someone else say, that all of our work should be like a prayer. But finally, he realized that, as he put it, "My work had become my prayer." He lost sight of the one thing necessary, and finally burned out, because busy-ness took over.

Abraham

Abraham, in today's first reading, acted a bit like Martha, but he also seems to have had some insight into the one most important thing. As with Mary, he recognized the Lord's presence. Three men whom he had never seen came to visit. Were they angels who, because they are in God's presence, kind of shine with the glory of God? Were they the Father, Son and Spirit, a pre Christian foreshadowing of the Blessed Trinity? It doesn't tell us, but it does say that Abraham knew they were divine in some way.

What did Abraham do first? He bowed down in an act of worship. Only after that did he serve them, washing their feet, asking Sarah to make some bread, running himself, with his servants' help, to prepare a meal. Then he stood by under the tree while they ate. There was no talking, only Abraham standing in their presence while they ate. Abraham must have gotten the one thing necessary because the visitors give him the assurance that God will keep his promise of a child to be born to he and Sarah.

The One Thing - The Better Part

Let's go back to Martha and Mary. What was the problem? Martha was doing a beautiful thing by serving the Lord. The first problem is that she was burdened by

her serving. The focus was on herself rather than on the Lord. Secondly, she blamed both her sister and Jesus for how she was feeling. And what does our Lord ask her to do? Focus on the one thing. And what is the one thing? It's Jesus himself.

St. Theresa of Calcutta never lost sight of the relationship of both. She served the poorest of the poor and yet, no matter how great the need for that service, she got up very early and prayed for hours in front of the Blessed Sacrament, at Jesus' feet, before she would do the work of that day. That allowed her to see Jesus himself in every poor person she met. She could be at his feet, listening to him all day because she had done the one thing necessary first.

Conversion to Christ

I think we can't leave Martha in this state of disapproval. The story of the two sisters continues in John's gospel. When Lazarus dies and Jesus goes to Bethany to restore him to life, he meets both sisters at different points as he approaches. Both sisters say to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." But in the conversation Jesus has with Martha, she listens as he says to her: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? She said to him, Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming in to the world. Martha came to understand the one thing necessary in the face of the loss of her beloved brother. It's Jesus.

Paul

St. Paul puts the same understanding of the relationship between the two ways of being a disciple. I became the Church's servant to make the word of God fully known. And what is the Word of God. It is Jesus, whom we proclaim today.

The One Thing Today

The next time we are tempted to say, Lord do you not care about me, about my burdens, about my life, about the injustices committed against me, let us hear Jesus answer us: Of course, I care. Don't you know I gave my whole life to serve

you. In the garden, I submitted my human will to the divine will that you should know my plan to save you from the sin of busy-ness that wants to swallow you whole. That's the one thing that is necessary.

Today, we ask, which is greater, the bread and wine we made with our efforts, or Jesus in the body and blood that he gives back to us as food to nourish our souls and strength to serve him as he served us.

Where, today am I going to kneel or sit at the feet of Jesus and let him teach me and love me, in quiet prayer. There will come a day when we won't be able to serve Jesus in the poor. On that day, we pray that we will be in the presence of God, adoring and worshipping him. That's what we are made for, in eternity, when this short life is past. That's the one thing necessary.