

Homily for July 29

Feast of St Martha

Discipleship: An arduous ascent

Last week I went to Jasper with my family for a couple of days and we did some serious hiking. I have come to love hiking over the years. One of the reasons I so value it is because there are others whom I love, with whom I share the joy and the struggle that comes with long hikes. I took this picture last Friday after we had walked along a river path for just under five kilometres, ascended through a forested trail in the rain, that then brought us out onto a ridge with a precipitous ascent that leveled out at this viewpoint. From here we ascended another steep kilometre arriving at Verdant Pass, an extensive mountain meadow covered in heather.

Hiking is analogous to the life of faith - for to be a disciple of Jesus is to travel with others on the arduous ascent heavenward where we will behold the beauty of the Lord, a splendour I think is anticipated in the majesty of the Rocky Mountains.

So today I want to think with you about a hiking companion who took the arduous ascent heavenward before us, St Martha. I love Martha because I am so much like her. This sister of Lazarus and Mary loved Jesus deeply but she was also someone who found it hard to relate to him with a generous spirit. She had a tendency to complain, something I was aware of last Friday when contesting the most challenging part of the hike, and an attitude all too prevalent in my interior life at other times too.

Remember Martha when hosting Jesus for dinner protested: “Jesus, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all of the work?” I appreciate how Jesus answered her at the moment. “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things”. How I identify with Martha’s distractibility and worry, because the life’s journey is arduous and long – and worry - well comes so naturally to me!

In today’s Gospel we hear something of the same tone when upon greeting Jesus Martha says:

***Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.***<sup>1</sup>

There is in Martha this forthrightness, where she feels she can tell Jesus anything. He is able to receive her troubled complaint and help her see beyond the present situation to the larger invitation he offers her to pursue the summit with him. Jesus then goes on to speak about how Lazarus will rise again. As a devout Jew, Martha understood this in relation to the Last Day, when the righteous dead will share in the Resurrection. But notice what Jesus does next, he

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Jn 11:21–22). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

invites Martha to discover more deeply how he is the companion who accompanies her on the way up the mountain now:

***I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?***<sup>2</sup>

Jesus invites Martha to know she will make it. Martha I invite you to just take it one step at a time. Because you are walking with me, you are on the path. Did you notice three times in these verses Jesus invites Martha to deeper faith and trust in him by the repeated use of the verb: “believe”? And what is her response?

***Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.***<sup>3</sup>

It is Martha’s honesty at naming her complaint explicitly before the Lord that then leads her to discover how Jesus is with her on the journey.

Each one of us faces particular challenges on the ascent. Today perhaps you feel you are in the woods, with no mountain in view, or perhaps you see the mountain-view but think I can’t take another step. Don’t give up, keep putting one foot in front of the other and know that because of your trust in Jesus you can pray with the Church in today’s Collect:

***Almighty ever-living God,  
whose Son was pleased  
to be welcomed in Saint Martha’s house as a guest,  
grant, we pray, that through her intercession,  
serving Christ faithfully in our brothers and sisters,  
we may merit to be received by you in the halls of heaven.***

Such a reception will surpass the welcome I received last Friday on the mountain trail. St Martha our companion on the arduous ascent, pray for us.

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<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Jn 11:25–26). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition\*](#). (1993). (Jn 11:27). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.