Homily for Memorial of St. Martha
July 29, 2016

Today is the memorial of St. Martha. When we think of her and her siblings Mary and Lazarus, we are in the company of those who were Jesus’ closest friends. Toward the end of his public life, the Lord would often stay at the home of these close friends. Strong bonds of affection closely unite the three to Jesus. In the Gospels when we are with Martha and family we find ourselves in their home.

The feast of St Martha is another occasion for us to enter into the home that was so often graced by the presence of Jesus in Bethany. There in the family formed by Martha, Mary and Lazarus, the Lord found affection and also rest for his body, tired out as it often was by never-ending travels through outlying towns and cities. Jesus sought refuge among his friends, especially during those final days when he more frequently encountered misunderstanding and scorn, particularly from the Pharisees. The sentiments of the Master towards his friends at Bethany are expressed by St John in his Gospel account:

*Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister and Lazarus.*

They were indeed true friends!

When He arrived, Lazarus had already been four days in the tomb. Despite the Lord’s apparent lack of response to their plea for help, her love and confidence had not been diminished.

*LORD – Martha tells him – if you were here, my brother would not have died.*

She upbraids him with great sensitivity for not having arrived earlier. Martha was hoping for her brother’s cure when he was still sick. And Jesus, with a friendly gesture, perhaps with a smile on his lips, surprised her: “Your brother will rise again”, he says. Martha receives these words of consolation, but understanding the final resurrection by his words she answers him:

*I know that he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.*

The response provokes an amazing declaration from Jesus regarding his divinity:

*I am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in me, though he die, shall live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.*

Jesus is saying

*I am the reason for being of all that exists.*

Jesus is the Life, not only the Life that begins hereafter, but also the present one in which supernatural grace works in our souls while we are still wayfarers. These extraordinary words assure us and draw us closer and closer to Christ. They lead us to make Martha’s response our own:
I believe you are the Christ, the Son of God, come into the world

As we think of Martha today and Jesus’ words to her, I call to mind these words of St. Augustine.

*Our Lord’s words teach us that though we labor among the many distractions of this world, we should have but one goal. For we are but travelers on a journey without as yet a fixed abode; we are on our way, not yet in our native land; we are in a state of longing, not yet of enjoyment. But let us continue on our way, and continue without sloth or respite, so that we may ultimately arrive at our destination.*

Augustine goes on to say that while on this journey we are to learn from Martha to serve Jesus as she did. Although we cannot see Jesus as Martha did, he is present to us in the Tabernacle and so we welcome him here so he can be at home. He is present today in Eucharistic adoration and so we as his friends welcome him. We receive him into our souls whenever we eat his body and blood and so make our souls his abode. We welcome him when we show kindness and consideration to each other and when we serve the poor and those in need. We welcome him when we make time to listen to someone with care and attention. All of these are ways we affirm in the present that Jesus is our friend too and we want him to feel at home in our daily lives.

And yet as we labor among the distractions of the world welcoming Jesus, we also keep these words of St. Augustine in mind:

*But you, Martha, if I may say so, are blessed for your good service, and for your labors you seek the reward of peace. Now you are much occupied in nourishing the body, admittedly a holy one. But when you come to the heavenly homeland will you find a traveler to welcome, someone hungry to feed, or thirsty to whom you may give drink, someone ill whom you could visit, or quarreling whom you could reconcile, or dead whom you could bury?*

No, there will be none of these tasks there. What you will find there is what Mary chose. There we shall not feed others, we ourselves shall be fed. Thus what Mary chose in this life will be realized there in all its fullness; she was gathering fragments from that rich banquet, the Word of God. Do you wish to know what we will have there? The Lord himself tells us when he says of his servants,

*Amen, I say to you, he will make them recline and passing he will serve them.*

Such is our confidence because Jesus is the Resurrection and the life. Such is our assurance so that in the present we can pray 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..