

## **The Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 17, 2022**

Martha and Mary, the women in today's gospel, were dear friends of Jesus. You may remember that it was their brother, Lazarus, whom Jesus' raised from the dead. It was their house in Bethany that He would go to when He wanted to relax and get away from the demands of His ministry. What a blessing that must have been for them, and how proud they must have been to host Jesus in their home.

Not only were Martha and Mary close friends of Jesus, they were also close followers. They believed that He was the Messiah. They listened to His sermons and tried to put them into practice. They were true disciples of His.

That may help explain what is going on in today's gospel. Remember that it was just last week that we heard the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It is very likely that Martha heard that parable and thought to herself, "To be a follower of Jesus means that I must serve those who are in need." And she would be right about that. In today's gospel, she has a house full of hungry men and she wants to do her best to feed them.

Also, two weeks ago, we heard Jesus' instructions to His disciples about when they go into towns to preach the good news. He tells them to accept whatever hospitality they receive when they enter those towns and to bless the homes they stay in with peace. Martha most likely also heard those words. She wanted to open her home to Jesus and His disciples so that they would bless her home with peace.

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Martha loves Jesus and wants to provide a meal that He will enjoy and that will refresh Him. From what we read in the gospels, Martha seems to be the type of person who likes to help others, who wants everything to be perfect, and who likes to stay busy.

Then there's Mary. She is not so interested in how clean the house is or how dinner is coming along. She is interested only in Jesus. Mary seems to be the type of person who is more focused on relationships than on getting things done. She also doesn't know how long Jesus will be around. So, she wants to take advantage of every minute she has with Him. She is happy just sitting at His feet and listening to Him talk about His Father in Heaven.

Many of us can probably relate to Martha's indignation at Mary. She is slaving away alone in the kitchen and could use some help. Many of us have been in the situation where we were left alone to do something with no one to help us. But many of us can also probably relate to Mary. We would love to have an opportunity to sit at the feet of Jesus, to look into His eyes, and to hear His voice.

Jesus' reply to Mary cuts right to the heart of the matter: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken away from her."

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These words of Jesus are important for us to hear, especially since we reflected on the Parable of the Good Samaritan last week and the sending out of Jesus' disciples the week before. We can fall into the belief that following Jesus is a matter of getting things done. If we are busy doing God's work, then we must be good Christians. This is especially true in Western society where we put so much emphasis on being productive. There is another dimension to the Christian life that can get lost when we allow ourselves to get anxious and worried about many things. It is the dimension of prayer.

A saint who wrote a lot about prayer, Saint Francis de Sales, said, "Every one of us needs half an hour of prayer a day, except when we are busy - then we need an hour." It is when we are anxious and worried about many things that we need prayer to remind us why we are so busy in the first place. Prayer helps us focus on Jesus. It calms our spirits and revives our energy. But prayer also seems to be the first thing we stop doing when we are busy. We just "don't have time." We cannot let that happen. Jesus tells us that listening to Him is the "better part." So, we should make it the better part of our day every day, but especially if we are feeling overwhelmed.

Jesus' words to Martha are important for another reason. Too often, we believers can sometimes make our Christianity just about one thing. For instance, people who serve in soup kitchens can sometimes think that it is all about serving the poor and that, if you are not serving the poor, you are not a good Christian. Other people make Christianity just about going to Mass and prayer. To them, if your day isn't filled with rosaries, Divine Mercy chaplets, and other devotions, then you are not a good Christian.

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If we are paying close attention to Jesus, then we understand that following Him means doing all those things. It means serving the poor AND praying. It means going to Mass AND going to the soup kitchen. There are many ways to follow Jesus. All of them are important.

At the same time, it's true that some of us have gifts that others don't have. Some of us may be more like Martha who was good at organizing and getting things done. We need Marthas in the Church. But, many of us may be more like Mary who was good at listening and praying. We need Marys in the Church also. Whatever your gift may be, use it for the glory of God. So be thankful for those who have a different gift, because none of us can do it all.

Jesus promises us that, if like Mary we seek the better part, it will not be deprived of us. If we seek Jesus in prayer, then we will find Him. If we spend time quietly in His presence, then we can be sure that He will speak to us. No matter how busy we are, we will not be very effective in serving Jesus if we are not spending time listening to Him. By taking that half an hour to an hour every day to sit at His feet, we will become better Christians, no matter what our gifts may be.