

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

cf. Luke 8:15

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are they who have kept the word with a generous heart

and yield a harvest through perseverance.

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 10:38-42; L108C

Jesus entered a village

where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him.

She had a sister named Mary who sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak.

Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said,

“Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving?

Tell her to help me.”

The Lord said to her in reply,

“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 from her.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

The Martha and Mary story in Luke is so familiar many people refer to themselves as either a “Martha,” meaning they are good at or even prefer working in the kitchen, or a “Mary,” meaning they do not worry about such things. Indeed this gospel has been quoted so often and used to support so many various understandings of ministry, household chores, the role of women, and more, that it is good to simply step back and read the words, or listen carefully when they are proclaimed.

Ultimately, it is the last verse that causes many to perk up or question their own priorities. Is it really the better part to

sit and visit, leaving others to do the serving?

What if the Marthas of the world stopped

working in the kitchen, leaving the Marys

and even Jesus himself without a meal!

At its worst, some use this passage

to reinforce traditional domestic roles

of women and men, with women doing

the serving and men doing the reclining,

visiting, and eating. Sometimes the read-

ing is also used to claim that religious life

(priesthood/sisterhood) is “better” than

the lay state. But such facile readings do

not do justice to the short story in Luke. In

fact, they turn the moral of the story on

its head.

Primarily, it is significant that Jesus

is interacting with two women. One,

Mary, is seated at his feet, listening to his

instruction as a disciple, though she is not

called that here. The other, Martha, is “bur-

dened with much serving” in attempting to prepare a meal

for Jesus. Jesus tells Martha in effect that the proper service for a disciple in this situation is to listen to Jesus. It is not to fret about serving meals.

Luke will make this point again in Acts of the Apostles, when the apostles are too busy serving at table to be attentive to God’s word and to prayer. To free themselves up for prayer and reading the word, the apostles appoint seven to serve at table, as “deacons.” The deacons then do just that. They see to the needs of the Hebrew-speaking and Greek-speaking Christians, so that the apostles can devote themselves entirely to their ministry.

The gospel reading today is not about the role of women, or the clerical/religious state versus the laity. Instead, the story demonstrates that the proper role of a disciple is attentiveness to Jesus and his word.



Living the Paschal Mystery

It is so easy for us to be consumed by activities, checking boxes, crossing items off lists. There can be a great satisfaction in acting this way and a tremendous sense of accomplishment. But we hear a different message with other priorities today. Rather than busy ourselves or stir ourselves into a frenzy, it is the proper role of a disciple to listen to Jesus’ instruction. And this does not mean become a priest or sister. Instead, it can mean to spend time in prayer, or with Scripture, coming to know the person of Jesus in a better way. This activity is critical for

any disciple. And the example we have today is that of a woman. Luke is clear in presenting Jesus as giving pride of place to the disciple who listens to his instruction. Let us go and do the same.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. / There is need of only one thing.

To the point: In the Bible we hear of seven people who are called by name twice: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, Martha, Simon, and Saul. Some of these calls come in extraordinary circumstances. An angel stops Abraham’s hand just as he is about to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice. Moses hears God’s voice from a burning bush. Saul is thrown down on the road to Damascus in search of Christians to persecute. Martha’s calling, however, takes place within the confines of everyday life as she and her sister Mary offer hospitality to an itinerant preacher, Jesus of Nazareth. Just as Moses is called away from shepherding his father-in-law’s flock and hiding in the desert, and Saul is turned back from his pursuit of Christians, Martha is called from her anxieties and worries. Only without these burdens clouding her vision can she see the man who sits before her. He is the Word of God. The only hospitality he desires is for people to sit at his feet and listen.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: Abraham and Sarah also offer hospitality to three mysterious visitors. Christians see these men as representing the triune God, though the Old Testament text says, “The LORD appeared to Abraham.” Abraham’s response seems much like Martha’s. He eagerly invites the men to pause in their travel and rest awhile with him. He rushes about asking for Sarah to make bread and choosing a calf for one of his servants to butcher and prepare. Finally, he joins the men under the tree and waits on them while they eat. Abraham, like Martha, focuses on taking care of the physical needs of his guests. Unlike Martha, Abraham doesn’t seem upset or worried about it—but then, he also has Sarah and his servant helping him with the work!

to experience: Hospitality was a revered part of the ancient culture of Abraham and even Jesus’ time. It was important to offer food, drink, and rest in a desert or wilderness region, lest a traveler perish. As Christians we are invited into this hospitality, not for fear of death, but because we recognize Jesus within each and every person we welcome.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Our verses from Psalm 15 for today are in response to a question: “LORD, who may abide in your tent? / Who may dwell on your holy mountain?” (15:1; NABRE). In the first reading and the gospel, Abraham, Sarah, Mary, and Martha all have an intimate encounter with God where they offer hospitality to the Lord. In a way they are “abiding in God’s tent.” The psalmist tells us that those who are upright, truthful, and just are the ones who will dwell with the Lord.

to psalmist preparation: We, also, are invited to abide with God. How do you put the traits of uprightness, truthfulness, justice into practice in your own life?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

In our readings we see Abraham and Sarah, Mary and Martha caring for the needs of a visitor. How do you practice hospitality in your own life?

If Jesus were speaking to you, what burdens and anxieties would he tell you to let go of?

When someone’s name is called twice in the Bible his/her life is about to change forever. Have you experienced a moment in your life where you felt God calling you to something new?

How might you find more time in your daily life to sit at Jesus’ feet and listen?