

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, He entered a certain village, where a woman name Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what He was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to Him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thin. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

The Gospel of the Lord

Reflection Questions

- 1) **Context:** The powerful context for this passage is the story that precedes it, the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The reader will notice that there are certain similarities between the two stories. First, the Samaritan demonstrates his love for the beaten up man by attending to him lovingly one on one. Mary demonstrates her love for Jesus by taking time to listen to Him, one on one. In the story of the Samaritan we are introduced to a ‘certain man’ (the one who got beaten) and in this story we are introduced to a ‘certain woman’ (Martha, vs. 38). The Samaritan has the capacity to connect lovingly because he can see. Mary has the capacity to connect with another in love because she can hear. These stories compliment each other perfectly. In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus is challenging the Pharisee into greater ‘actions’ of love (as He says in vs. 37 “Go and do likewise’). In the Mary/Martha story, Jesus is asking for contemplative connection with Him. Martha is so busy that she becomes distracted from what is most important.

- 2) There are some interesting role reversals in this text. First, we notice that Jesus is visiting a home owned and run by a woman, Martha. Martha, was clearly a woman of means. In a gender-segregated society, such women were the exception not the norm. She was clearly in charge. Because she was the one ‘running the show’, she felt legitimated in shaming her sister. When/how have we ever used our position of power to try to shame or manipulate another?

- 3) ‘As they went on their way, they entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home.’ (vs. 38). The ‘they’ in this passage are presumably Jesus and His disciples. They are all on their way to Jerusalem where Jesus will be killed; a dark shadow of death looms ominously over these scenes. Martha welcomes all of them into her home. Mary, Martha and Lazarus are all siblings living in Bethany. Bethany is only 2 miles from Jerusalem, the same town where Jesus will be anointed by Mary, and the same place where Jesus will raise Lazarus from the dead (John chp. 11). Martha is welcoming a whole group of people to her home so her stress level is humanly understandable. The text tells us that “Martha was distracted by many tasks” The word distracted here implies that

her attention was being taken away from something more important. Her stress level was high; but still not a good enough reason (according to Jesus) to be distracted from the miracle of what is before her. Martha is more concerned about her reputation as a “good host” (e.g. providing enough food and comfort in a timely manner) than she is about attending to the miracle of God that is in her midst. When have we allowed certain circumstances to overwhelm us and distract us from a more important thing happening in our midst? What has been the result? No one at the end of their lives says; “I wish I had spent more time at the office.” What kinds of things might God want us to spend more time doing? (e.g. time with people we love/family, time reaching out to others in need, time studying scripture, praying?)

- 4) Mary sits at Jesus’ feet. This is the stance of a disciple. The term disciple means “one who sits at the feet of the teacher (in this case Jesus) and learns.” Mary takes a risk by sitting at his feet because she is stepping out of the female role that would be expected of her (e.g. to be preparing food for the guests that have just arrived). It is as if through her stance, Mary is sending the message, ‘I have signed up for seminary because I am a disciple of Jesus’. This would have been highly offensive to the other woman who had many ‘female’ tasks to attend to and needed help. When and how have you felt called by Jesus to step out of a ‘societally- imposed’ role in order to follow what you were feeling most deeply called to by Jesus? What was the result?

- 5) “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me.” (40b). Martha is trying to appeal to a higher authority to get Mary back in line on two counts; 1) Mary should be helping lift the enormous load of tasks off of Martha. 2) Mary, as far as Martha is concerned, should not be assuming the male role of disciple. Martha is whining about these two things, appealing to Jesus for sympathy. On the one hand it is easy for us to empathize with Martha’s work load. On the other hand, if Jesus has established a different priority in this context who is she to try to trump His priorities. Martha seems to be lacking trust in the *One* who fed the 5,000 that He can make the meal turn out fine. When have we mistrusted Jesus’ priorities and His way of providing? What are the two main sources of Martha’s anger? How is her anger related to her need to receive societal acceptance for her social role?(having made an idol out of her reputation). When have we been

caught in such a place? How does Jesus invite us to step aside from unnecessary stress in our lives? (See Matt. 28-30).

- 6) Jesus' quick response to Martha, shows that He can read her heart. He knows that she has much work to do in the kitchen, but He *never* told her that His hunger was a priority. Jesus notes Martha's distraction and not her hospitality. He has demonstrated His priorities by sitting and teaching. Martha may be worried about her reputation as a good hostess, but her worries distract her from the real substance of what is happening. She wants to feed Jesus and His disciples with physical food, but Jesus wants to feed all of them with *spiritual food*. Therefore, He makes an example of Mary and tells everyone present that she has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her. In what ways do you feel like a Martha in the various roles that you play? When do you feel like Mary? How do the two compliment each other in your life? How do they compete with each other in your life? What is the spiritual food that Jesus is inviting you to partake of today? (Eucharist? Prayer? Other sacraments? Community? Service?) Let us take time this week to ask Jesus to help us name His priorities for our lives (e.g. what is a distraction, what is a spiritual food) and ask Him to help us to step out of those distractions so that we are free to partake of what He has for us.