

Reflection for the 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time

In our Gospel Reading this Sunday taken from the Gospel of Luke 10:38-42, we hear of Jesus visiting the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. While Jesus is at the home, Mary is at the feet of Jesus listening to Him, and Martha is serving the guests. Finally, we hear of Martha coming to Jesus and asking Him to tell Mary to help her, Jesus responds by saying “*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.*” As humans, we search for the meaning of life and a close relationship with our Creator. It seems to be a natural part of the human condition that we are convinced there is meaning and purpose in our lives that transcends our time and space, and we spend our lives searching for the meaning of life and our purpose in the world, when we find it we find peace.

Knowing that God has created us and that He wishes to have a relationship with us in this world and the next. The natural question that we can and do ask ourselves is how do we stay in His presence, and allow Him to be an active part of our lives? Our Gospel Reading this Sunday appears to present us with two answers or options. The active life of Martha, being engaged in the world and making a difference, or the other option is the contemplative life of Mary, who sits at the feet of Jesus Christ and listens to Him. In the last sentence of our Gospel Reading this Sunday Jesus appears to give His preference for how we should open ourselves to Christ and it is through the contemplative life and not the active life of service. But is Jesus truly showing a preference for the contemplative life over the active life of service or is there something else going on in our Gospel Reading this Sunday? Is He pointing out that both paths lead to Him, and we can choose our path, but clearly one of the options is a better choice? Does this translate into our complete relationship with God? He has given us free will, but does He have a preferred path for us to follow in having a relationship with Him and being a part of His salvific plan for the world? I think many good and holy people would have very different answers to these questions. In the end I would think that most people would see a balance on active ministry and a contemplative prayer life as the best option, that will bring a person peace in their journey of life.

At this point it might make sense to revisit our Gospel Reading. Taking another look at Mary and Martha, we can see that Mary makes her choice and appears to have no issue with the choice that Martha makes. Martha, in choosing the active ministry finds herself overwhelmed and looking for help so she prevails on Jesus and asks Him to tell Mary to help her. Jesus’ response to Martha is not seeing one choice as superior to another but rather pointing out they both are needed. This is true for us, in our daily lives we need the time for quiet prayer and contemplation just as much as we need the time for active involvement in daily activities. For any Parish to be healthy we need to have opportunities for public and private prayer, just as we need to have opportunities to have activities and gatherings. Our Parish is blessed to have many opportunities for prayer, be it our Liturgies, times for Adoration, or times to pray the Rosary or other Catholic Prayers. We also in our Parish have many activities, be it Coffee and Donuts or, putting meals together for the poor. The activities and prayer opportunities of our Parish provide us with a way to embrace the positive examples that are presented to us today by Mary and Martha in our Gospel Reading.

We might have lingering thoughts as to why did Martha asked for Mary’s help. Mary was clearly engaged in the conversation that was taking place. Did Martha believe what Mary was doing to be less important than her own active ministry? Do we see prayer as something less important than our activities in the world? Does our prayer life consist of the leftover time that we have in our day or week? Jesus by His statement to Martha, elevates the time for prayer and contemplation to the same level as active ministry. He does not see it as something to do when all the work is done and now, we have time to rest and pray. Jesus is reminding us through His words to Martha “*you are anxious and worried about many things,*” that in choosing active ministry or contemplative prayer, we should have an inner peace. Mary clearly had an inner peace, and Jesus points that fact out by saying “*Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken from her.*” Martha, in choosing active ministry did not seem to have an inner peace. May we in our journey in this world find the inner peace that comes from following Christ Jesus, and may we know that just like Mary it will not be taken from us.