

21st July 2019 (16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Genesis 18:1-10; Psalm 14(15):2-5; Colossians 1:24-28; Luke 10:38-42.

'You worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed!'

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus is invited for a meal by Martha. One would presume Martha had nothing prepared, so she busily sets out to cook a nice meal fit for a prophet. Her sister, meanwhile, simply sits at Jesus' feet absorbing his words.

Some people struggle with this story; they often tend to take sides for or against one of the two sisters. Some insist that Mary should indeed have gone to help Martha in the kitchen; yet Jesus says that it is Mary who has chosen the better role.

Indeed, the evangelist too takes sides against Martha. He tells us that Martha is 'distracted;' Luke does not suggest she is busy preparing the meal but rather that she is not paying enough attention, not focused.

This story does not speak primarily about hospitality but about discipleship; what is the role of the disciples in their master's presence? Like Martha, we can very easily be distracted with many things. We are very good at creating rituals and regulations at how to behave at prayer, and once these rules and regulations are set, we to the one who dares to challenge or break them! Yet Jesus is more interested in our listening hearts, attentive to his words and teachings.

We need to remind ourselves that this gospel story is 'coloured' with a sense of urgency. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where he will be going back to the Father; he is concerned that there is not enough time left to teach his disciples. Although Jesus still needs to eat and to rest, but there are more important things to 'worry' about. Martha is more concerned in putting on a 'Master Chef' performance; Jesus tells her to prepare a simple dish – indeed only one thing is enough – and then go and sit at his feet like a true and faithful disciple.

As we read this passage we may need to remind ourselves that Jesus does not come among us as a king, but in humility and simplicity. He does not travel around with a court of attendants, but as a traveling preacher and a prophet. His most important asset is God's word that he preaches, and the best way to respect him is to listen to his word.

Jesus is God-with-us; God who chose to take on a poor and simple human form, like us in everything except for sin! God indeed dwells within us, around us, and is with us all the time. We have different ways how God is present to us; through his Spirit he is in us at all times, he is with us in his word that we hear and reflect upon, he is with when two or three are gathered in his name and he is with us in the Eucharist. Each presence is fully and equally a divine presence.

Like Martha, often in our prayers we tend to create different ways how to honour our God. Jesus tells us not to get distracted, worrying and fretting about many things that are meant to express our worship to God. What is essential is for us to sit at God's feet and to be in God's presence, listening to and reflecting on his word; basking in the light radiating from his presence.

We need to follow Mary's lead and simply sit still, making God's presence the greatest focus of our life. This is what the great contemplative saints did; being continuously aware of living in God's presence. This way our whole life, becomes prayer; we do not need to do anything to pray, prayer is an attitude of being present to and in God, at each moment of our life.

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