

Homily for Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 16th/17th, 2022

By Deacon Richard Hay

Last week we heard Jesus tell the story of the Good Samaritan which focused on love of neighbor and how important it is to love our neighbor no matter who they might be.

In today's gospel, the story of Jesus's visit with Martha and Mary is right after last week's gospel story. Luke places these two stories next to each other because after last week's message of loving all our neighbors, Jesus continues that theme of love by focusing on the importance of loving the Lord our God.

Anyone who has ever hosted a gathering at their home likely knows all about what Martha is going through. In fact, hospitality was a very important aspect of life in Jewish culture, and it could be considered a slight to not provide proper hospitality to guests and visitors.

In those days it was a duty and expectation to do these things but as we know Martha was a little bit irritated with her sister for not helping out. In response, she approaches Jesus and asks him to tell Mary to help.

As you hear her words to Jesus, you can sense the frustration and anxiety in her voice – she is working hard to be a proper host and Mary instead is at the feet of Jesus listening to him talk.

Jesus responds by saying “Martha – Martha”. The repetition of her name is intended to draw emphasis to what comes afterwards – much like when Jesus says “Amen – Amen” in scripture – something important is about to be said.

In this case, he tells Martha that she is anxious and worried about many things and that there is only need for one thing and that Mary has chosen that part and it will not be taken from her. This is a powerful answer to Martha and to us about Mary’s choice to be sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him.

We all need to spend time with the Lord and listen to him in the silence of our hearts without all the hustle and bustle that comes with life, family, friends, work, and other activities. I understand that life can be like that, and those types of activities are necessary and we have all likely experienced those kind of days – being on the run constantly.

However, the Lord is telling us that if we just run around taking on task after task, errand after errand and never slow down then we miss opportunities to hear Him when he talks to us. Remember, the Lord is not in the roaring wind, or the earthquake, or the fire but in the gentle whisper. It's hard to hear that whisper though when we are in constant motion.

If we never slow down to listen to Him in that quiet whisper, we miss opportunities to find the Lord in our daily lives.

So, what might a silent whisper look like in our world?

It could be a beautiful sunrise over the St. John's River; or in the softness of a summer rain as we sit and listen on our patios; or in the quiet of night when others are asleep and you are sitting quietly in prayer; or maybe you're an early riser – I love that time of day myself – whenever it is – there is a common factor – quiet – time to contemplate and reflect.

Prayer does not have to be a constant dialog of us tossing all our petitions to the Lord in a one-way conversation. We must take a breath and listen for him to respond – otherwise – what's the point? Where's the relationship?

We should also keep in mind that the Lord's response to our prayer is not likely to come in an obvious way like a burning bush or a thundering voice from heaven. It might come through the words of another person we encounter in the course of our day, but that message might not be heard if we are running around from one task to another and constantly busy.

So take time to encounter others in a personal and deep way, talk about faith, joys, heartbreaks, and other facets of life and when you walk away, contemplate what you have heard by silently reflecting on those words.

Whatever it is – just sit in the presence of the Lord and listen.

Now, this is a significant shift from how much of the world approaches day to day life. There can be a sense that if we haven't checked off twenty items from our to do list each day that we have wasted our day or are considered a failure.

Not so says Jesus – this is where the world view and expectations diverge from how we as Christians should try and approach life.

Remember at the transfiguration, when God's voice from heaven tells us that Jesus is His beloved Son, and we should listen to Him?

That is exactly the choice Mary has made. As important as they are, all those other tasks, our own to do lists, it can all wait while we spend time with Jesus.

We can often believe that the one hour or so here at Mass each week is enough to find Jesus in the quiet whisper or that it is the only necessary encounter we need with the Lord.

It is indeed a blessing to hear and encounter Jesus through the source and summit of our faith – the holy sacrifice of the Mass. However, I would venture to say that it isn't enough. That's where the gifts of the Church can come in together and help us experience and hear Jesus.

Through reconciliation we can hear His forgiveness, through sacred scripture we can hear His words to us, and through the Eucharist, the true presence of Christ on this altar and in the tabernacle – we can hear Him and become one with Him.

One last lesson to be understood from today's gospel is that we should never do anything that would take another away from their

encounter with Christ. It wasn't Martha's intent to take Mary away from listening at the feet of Jesus – she just wanted some help with the cooking and other hosting chores. So we should also be careful about the unintended consequences of our own actions in similar situations.

Being active and being contemplative – each approach has their role in our lives. One way we can connect our daily activities to the Lord is to make each activity a prayer to Him. Whether it is doing the dishes, cooking a meal, washing the clothes, or even running errands on our to do list – offer those activities up to the Lord.

Then – later in your day – find time to sit at the feet of Jesus and contemplate his great love for us while you listen to Him just like Mary did that day.