

VI Sunday – 07.18.2010 Sacred Heart and St. Ann's Churches.

John Lennon, one of the Beatle's singer and song writer, seems to have said, "Life is what happens to you when you are busy making other plans." This saying very much sounds like the admonition that Jesus gives to Martha in the Gospel text of today – "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things." This section of the Gospel has to be read in connection with the parable of the Good Samaritan that we read last weekend. If the parable of the Good Samaritan emphasizes the horizontal dimension of relationships by being connected with the community, this story of Martha and Mary stresses the vertical dimension of it.

A mother wanted her daughter to be a complete Christian, so she named her Martha Mary. I wonder why she put the name Martha first. I sense it is because of an underlying sympathy for Martha. It just doesn't seem right for one sister to be in the kitchen doing all the work of getting the meals done while the other just sits and talks with the guest. Those of you who are committed homemakers can appreciate Martha's irritation, particularly if you have a less motivated sister or brother. It's a priceless story with a very important message: You can't work your way into the Kingdom of God. You can only receive it.

Modern Christians are mostly "doers." We place strong emphasis on the idea that 'what counts is what we do for Jesus'. Some would even go so far as to say that it doesn't matter so much what we believe - it's what we do that matters. Of course, that's somewhat like saying that it doesn't matter so much what the farmer plants - it's what he reaps that counts. We are not so much pleased to hear the Lord telling Martha that Mary has "chosen the good portion." We are skeptical about it. However, like all the words of Jesus, these words are sound and true - then and now - in the living of the Christian life. They are words that our fast-paced life needs to hear.

The coin of Christian life has two sides to it: listening to Jesus and doing for Jesus. Jesus sets the priority in today's Gospel. Worship is the central act of religion. To sit at the feet of Jesus, to experience the joy of personal fellowship with Jesus, to sense the presence of our Lord is surely the richest privilege and the highest blessing of our faith. It floods the soul with joy and refreshing streams of life. Worship is the central act of religion.

On his return from vacation, a pastor visited one of the elderly women of his Parish. He asked her what she thought of the sermons his substitute had preached. She said that they were helpful and refreshing. He asked her what the sermons were about and she told him she couldn't actually remember. "Oh, my," the pastor said. "That's just like as if you took this wicker basket down to a spring and filled it with water. By the time you got back home there would be no water in it." "That's true," she replied, "but the basket would be a whole lot cleaner."

We sing in Psalm 51, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10) This is what worship should do. To sit alone, or with others in the body of Christ, at the feet of Jesus - to sense his presence and hear his words that floods the soul with joy and refreshing streams of life. At worship the fires of the Christian life are lighted and fed. At worship we find and renew the reason and the inspiration to live a life of Christian service to other people. Worship is the central act of religion.

Turn now to the other side of the coin of the Christian life - the relation of the experience of worship to the practical life of Christian service. Listening to Jesus should result in doing things for Jesus by loving and serving other people. We are not told in today's Gospel whether Mary helped Martha with the after-dinner cleaning up when Jesus had gone, but we would hope that such a kindly, helpful relationship with her sister would be the end result of sitting at the feet of Jesus.

There is a chapel somewhere in Wisconsin that has a stained glass window in the entrance, showing the picture of Jesus with open arms. Some people, seeing it for the first time, remarked, "How meaningful! He seems to be inviting us in to worship." "That's true," the pastor said. "He is indeed inviting us in to worship." When the service was over and the same person was going out the door, he looked up at the window again. There was the beautiful picture of Jesus, with the same inviting open arms. "Look!" he said. "Now he seems to be inviting us out." "Right," the pastor said. "The Jesus who invited you to worship, now invites you to go out into the world to serve other people in his name." That is the invitation at the end of every Mass - The Mass is ended, let's go in peace to love and serve the Lord. It invites us to continue the celebration of the Eucharist in our lives by service.

Our Lord Jesus is greatly interested not only in what goes on in the church, but in what goes on in the office, at home and at work. That's where we spend most of their time. That's where the Christian life is to be lived. A mother, listening to the bedtime prayers of her little daughter, heard the listing of requests for blessings that children often make - Mommy and Daddy and Grandma and Grandpa and on and on. She was surprised, to hear the child conclude her prayer with these words: "Now, Jesus, what would you like me to do for you?" The little girl had grasped the relationships of the Christian life: conversation with Jesus results in the desire to do something for Jesus.

To be doers of the Word of God and witnesses to our faith is not only the fulfillment of our faith, but the mandate of the Master. Our Lord Jesus needs his Marys, Marthas both. The desire, the determination and the courage to serve our Lord comes as a result of our communion with him in worship. The first priority of the Christian life is to sit at the feet of Jesus - absorbing him in personal and communal worship, in reading the Bible and in the celebration of sacraments. Everything else follows that.

Have you discovered that need in your life? Many of us are very busy people. We are busy in the church, busy in the community, busy in our work. We are productive and are successful. But have we found that one thing that is needed, that one thing that will transform us and give us peace? Take a lesson from Martha's sister Mary. The most important thing you can do is to take a few minutes each day and sit at the feet of Jesus.

May our heavenly Father grant that we may learn to love Jesus deeply by worshiping him and in serving him. Amen
