

## **16<sup>th</sup> Sunday C, Ordinary time**

**Gen 18:1-10; Col 1:24-28; Luke 10:38-42**

Jesus came to the house of Mary and Martha. Martha got carried away by the details of hospitality. Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him. During this Mass, we have an opportunity to do what Mary did, namely, spend some time in the presence of the Lord. The first reading and the Gospel are hospitality stories. Hospitality was an esteemed virtue in the ancient world. It is still a highly necessary and regarded virtue in today's world.

In the first reading, we see how three strangers [heavenly companions] visited Abraham. Abraham reacted with instinctive hospitality and YAHWEH rewarded his hospitality. This sets the scene for Martha and Mary who welcomed Jesus to their home. We see the contrast between Martha's activity and Mary's quiet devotion to the Lord. The story of Mary and Martha can be seen as a parable in action. Whereas the parable of the good Samaritan of last week stressed the importance of practical love in the life of a Christian, this week's Gospel stresses the importance of contemplation and prayer. Action and contemplation marks the life of a disciple. Both are necessary and have to be integrated into the life of a disciple, a Christian. Our sympathy is with Martha. It might seem that Jesus was unfair to her. After all, Jesus places great emphasis on deeds. Yet here he praises not the doer, but one who sits and listens.

Jesus was making a point for the benefit of people like Martha who are essentially generous and are over-anxious about getting things done. It is not simply that she was busy but that she was too busy. Always anxious and worried, she was too worried, perhaps a slave to her duties, one might say. Our daily lives are made up of a round of chores and duties which fall into two categories: the urgent, and the essential. Many of the things we do could be said to be urgent, but only a few could be said to be essential. Like Martha, we get often get frenetic and obsessed about the urgent issues. We give priority to the urgent while the essential gets postponed sometimes indefinitely. When it is done at all, it is done hurriedly and badly. How can we know our priorities.

The best way to know our priorities is by asking ourselves, what do we give most of our time to? What gets most of our energy? Those are our priorities in fact. It takes tragedies and emergencies to put things into perspective or to remind us of what really and truly matters. To get our priorities wrong are the easiest and commonest things in the whole wide world. We fall victims to this as flies fall to light. Cardinal Joseph Bernardine, the famous and late archbishop of Chicago said when he learned that he had a terminal illness, "I came to realize how much of what consumes our daily lives are trivial, [and I like to add 'banal'] and

insignificant". Mary got her priorities right, she dropped everything and listened to the words of Jesus. Many of us would probably identify more with Martha, busy about so many things, constantly short of time. We need to look beyond the daily chores, emergencies and urgencies. We need for ourselves, our Lord and others. All three should be well blended to make a healthy, holistic spiritual development. There perhaps should be a period of 'non-doing' in our lives. Non-doing is essential for the nourishment of our souls.

We do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside some time to be with and to listen to God. Jesus tell us in Matthew 7:7, ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will open for you. In Luke 22: 46 Jesus says 'pray so as not to be put to temptation. In Mark 1:45, we are told that Jesus got up, long before dawn and went to a lonely place to pray'. The strength for all that Jesus did came from those lonely and quiet places where he went and prayed.

Most of us say morning and evening prayers but alas these prayers often consist of over-familiar words, which we mumble in haste while our thoughts race ahead of the tasks that await us. Such prayers are like washing one's hands fully dressed when what is needed is a full bath or a shower. We need concentrated, dedicated prayer, prayer in which our hearts stir and in which we melt into God, a prayer in which our hearts sing 'like a sun flower which follows every movement of the sun so I turn towards you, to follow you my Lord'. Such prayer begins where words and expression ends. The words that reach our lips are often but waves on the surface of our being. The highest form of worship is silence. Prayer is often not about words, but about communion with God. It is a resting in the presence of God. In prayer we discover that what matters is not when our lives will end but when it will actually start. Sometimes, our lives starts shortly before it ends. Sometimes, it ends without actually starting at all.