

A few weeks ago, I was feeling extremely overwhelmed with everything going on in my life. My work kept piling up and I couldn't find time to finish anything that I had started. And every single time that I started working on something, somebody would stop by who wanted something more from me. I especially remember how a homeless man that I often help stopped by every day of the week to ask for help. All I could do was beg God to give me a little bit of joy so that I could make it through the day.

This experience made it easy for me to relate with Martha in today's Gospel. She was trying to be a good host, running around doing everything she could to serve Jesus, but she quickly became overwhelmed. Then, she looked down and saw that her sister was doing nothing to help her so she blurted out, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me." I am sure that we have all felt like that before, frustrated that it seems like we are doing all of the work on our own while others are sitting around doing nothing.

Jesus' response to Martha probably felt like a slap in the face. "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." I can only imagine how I would have reacted if Jesus had said that to me. My first instinct would have been to say, "Well then you can just get up and wash your own dishes." When we hear these words of Jesus, it is easy to think that He is condemning Martha for running around working instead of sitting there to listen to Him with Mary.

That kind of simplistic understanding, however, completely misses the point. Think back to the first reading that the Church chose to be paired with today's Gospel. There Abraham and Sarah also entertain a visit from God who appears to them in the guise of three men, an early foreshadowing of the Trinity. Immediately,

both Abraham and Sarah begin rushing about to prepare a meal for them. In gratitude, they tell Sarah that God will bless her with a child.

Today's readings are not trying to condemn Martha's service. Remember that our faith is built on the understanding that we are all called to serve God by serving those around us with love. Think back to Jesus' famous parable of the separation of the sheep from the goats. Those who were destined for eternal life said, "Lord, when did we see you and serve you?" Jesus responded, "Amen, amen I say to you, whenever you served the least of your brothers and sisters you served me."

The problem was not that Martha was serving but instead the fact that she let what she was doing distract her from Jesus. Whenever God comes to us, we must pay attention and receive Him with open hearts. As we reflect on His words, they will penetrate into the depths of our hearts with peace that overflows back out of us in joy, manifesting itself as service to our neighbors.

While Mary was allowing the words of God to penetrate her heart, Martha allowed the distractions in her life turn her away from Jesus. As Jesus told her, "You are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing." In this context, we must ask ourselves what is this one thing? Theologically speaking, we can say that our Triune God exists in unity. All that is good is united in God. Therefore, in God love is joy which is peace. The only thing we need to do is allow God's words to penetrate our hearts so that He rests in us and we rest in Him. When we do this, our hearts become filled with His peace and joy and love.

This means that when we work for God and serve God, the things that we do should bring us peace and joy even if they are difficult and require sacrifice. So if the things that we are doing for God are making us anxious and worried, then we are doing something wrong. Either we are doing something that God is not actually asking us to do or we have forgotten that we are doing it for God.

We can also never forget that the call to love and serve those around us often requires sacrifice. This is a beautiful insight that we can take away from today's second reading of Paul to the Colossians. Paul reminds us that the sufferings we endure out of love perfect us and prepare us for heaven. As he says, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the Church."

Martha was doing a good thing in trying to serve Christ. This is something that we are all called to do as Christians. But she lost sight of who she was serving and why she was serving Him. She became anxious and overwhelmed and so she forgot that she was serving out of love. She forgot that this sacrifice of love was her path to heaven.

I think that this it is very easy for us to fall into the same trap and become like Martha in our daily lives. We become overwhelmed by these things that we began doing out of love, and we start getting frustrated by the sacrifices, losing our joy because we forget that this is our way of serving God and preparing ourselves for heaven. This can occur in our ministries, in our jobs, and most especially in our service to our families.

As I mentioned at the start of this reflection, I had gotten overwhelmed in my service for the Church, and every new request felt like yet another imposition. And when I begged God to send me some joy in my day, I got even more frustrated when that homeless man began taking up even more of my time every single day. While I was walking over to the store to help him, complaining to God that I didn't have time for this, it was like God reached over and smacked me in the face. You see, I finally realized that God had been giving me chance to find joy every day only I didn't realize it because I had forgotten that in serving this beggar I was serving Christ Himself.