

Homily St Pius & St Anthony 16th Sunday Ordinary Year C1

We all know them, Marys & Marthas! We know them both. Martha is the hyper whirlwind worker, that comes along while you are visiting and dusts the table under your coffee cup as you are drinking it, while Mary is the dreamer who is so nonchalant that you worry if she's visiting, you wonder if she will ever leave, asking yourself, "Do I have enough coffee to outlast her? Mary is so into soaking up the moment! I had some friends who were both 'Marys' back in college and they offered me once a birthday dinner, saying "We want to treat you to dinner for your birthday, so we will come over at 6:30-don't you worry about a thing, we'll bring everything". So, I figured that meant we would eat at 6:30, but NO, I was so wrong, as they showed up with full grocery bags at 6:30 ready to cook it. It turned out that we had a casual meal-prep conversation visit until 9:30 pm when we finally ate! I hadn't planned on a whole night's drama- I thought I still might get some work done like notes recorded & calls made-before calling it a day (How Martha of me!) But I am not complaining, it was a completely enjoyable blessing but just not what I had timed for, and had in mind. But that is just like Mary who is into cultivating slow and carefully strengthened social bonds.

With this familiar story of Mary & Martha, there is one huge loose thread that we have to either pull on, or work back in to the fabric, and it is figuring out what Jesus means by saying to Martha that Mary has a 'better part-the one thing needed, that can't be taken from her' (Luke 10:42). We tend to hear this reading about the wonderful sisters and assume it is a catalog of two personality types (1-the active jump in there & go-get it done type, and 2)-the more contemplative brooding strategist that will get around to it sometime) with Jesus voting in favor of the Mary type. But He isn't doing that. I want to caution us against jumping to that conclusion, when we hear this from Him. This is not a story of either/or, & we don't have to choose one sister's behavior and reject the other--all or nothing. More than the outward action of the sisters, Jesus is commending the inward disposition that we manifest through our conduct. I think a good lens to use interpreting Jesus' comment about 'the one thing needed', is the lens of 'hospitality' (how we show hospitality to others-no just our actions but our disposition of openness to them). Mary shows one way of demonstrating hospitality and Martha shows another way of showing hospitality. They are sisters. Jesus loves them both and wants relationship with them both. And they, living together, need each other. I like how Thomas Merton teaches about Mary & Martha, that they do live in the same house, under the same roof so we always have to hold them together. Again, they both show Jesus hospitality, each in her own way. Martha is welcoming and open to Jesus by setting a table and providing banquet goods to consume, while Mary sits at his feet openly embracing and listening to his teaching, and by welcoming His word. They are both embodying hospitality uniquely as best fits them each. And what Jesus is preferring

about Mary, this 'one thing needed-better part' is not simply the external action of sitting at Jesus' feet versus rushing about the house. No, it is more about Mary's receptive and peaceful disposition. Jesus is preferring such a calm serene approach and outlook when it comes to welcoming and embracing the people around us. Let's look at Mary and Martha reflected in their demeanor, and how they interact with each other.

For sure, we all agree that Martha is worked up! She is hot, not just from being over the stove, but her mood is near boiling which is seen by how rude and frank she is with Jesus. Notice her words when she says, "Jesus, do you not care my sister has left me all the work?" I suggest that is a bad approach and strike one on Martha: don't insult the person you are making a request of! But Martha continues venting, by demanding of Jesus, "Tell her to help me!" Strike two, Martha, I might say to her, "Martha, you who are struggling with this little meal for three of us, you want to tell the master of the world how to do things?" But of course, Jesus doesn't react with anything like that, as He is the best psychologist ever. He knows Martha. He reads her and knows her heart (as he reads all of our hearts). He takes on the de-escalation task to calm and break through her anxiety. First, by gently calling her name twice, He is reflecting to her that he heard her, and acknowledges her frustration. He is telling her, 'I hear you Martha, 'a fly is in the broth or the rue burnt back there, or you discovered that Lazarus never refilled the butter churn, but it is all okay. We can eat later, adjusting our meal time, or we can eat out (*'Hey, Jesus is very good at stretching food, five loaves two fish to make dinner for as many people as want to join in!*) So, He wishes to soothe Martha's upset soul- she is sideways. But Jesus wants to share with Martha, that one thing needed, and it is **peace of heart**, contentment and serenity in whatever she is doing. One can be content and occupied in the kitchen, one can be peaceful even with a stove top covered with pots. Jesus wants Martha to have focus and calm in her work. So I don't think Jesus is commending the outward posture of sitting and chilling over being active and about work (that does need doing). No, He is commending the inward disposition of the soul that is at rest with Him regardless of their external works. The soul that is open and hospitable to Him regardless of what outward activity they are taking up. Speaking of hospitality and how we receive other people or not, what Jesus is preferring about Mary' disposition here, is that she accepts Martha as she is, and hasn't reacted trying to make Martha into her (*whereas, that is what Martha is doing to Mary-Martha is demanding of Jesus, that He make Mary be just like her-Martha isn't accepting & open to Mary-letting her be herself-Martha wants to remake her into another of her- and that is behind her pushy insistence to impose and make demands even of Jesus!*) Consider how Mary could have reacted to this whole situation. If Mary exhibited a similar attitude toward Martha (as Martha did by her blowup toward Mary) Mary would have charged into Martha's kitchen interrupting her meal prep and saying, 'Stop it, Martha, leave all that alone in

the kitchen, get in here and sit down, you above all, need to hear what Jesus is saying.’
(Get yourself over here and take a chill pill from Jesus). I have a feeling that Mary and Jesus were hearing Martha in the kitchen - If she is really so upset and getting to her boiling point, I am sure they were hearing her earlier signals of sighs, under her breath mutterings and the unnecessary banging of pots/pans before her eventual blow up. But Mary’s disposition is not that at all- she doesn’t make any demand on Martha, or try to force her to do anything or ‘look just like me’. Mary accepts/is open to her. (I wonder if Mary hasn’t told Jesus apologetically, ‘Please love her Jesus, she is just that way). And I suggest that is what Jesus finds to be the one thing needed-the better part not to be taken away that Mary exhibits, it is this hospitality of spirit that can accept people and their differences and work with/through them. We can see clearly that Martha’s anxiety and scrupulosity over domestic details has prevented her from honoring Mary’s difference. Martha’s issue that she is trying to make Mary be just like her, as if she is saying, “Mary you need to get in this kitchen and make yourself as miserable as I am.” And I fear that even if Mary got up and went back into that kitchen with her, it would only add to Martha’s discontent. Martha can physically pull Mary into the kitchen, but Mary is going to bring her Jesus-serenity with her to any of other work. If Mary discovers they have no cooking oil for the cake, she doesn’t panic, just use applesauce, or if there are no eggs in the cupboard for muffins, then just use mashed banana or yogurt. Mary may be dragged away from her seat at Jesus feet, but His peace is going to go with her (because of that ‘one thing needed-Jesus’ peace seen in her open and welcoming disposition). Such serenity is going to allow her to do her duty without being perturbed by anything! That is the one thing needed – Jesus! In whatever we are doing, whether we are sitting down & resting or standing in line waiting, or running left right in the workshop. It has to start with Jesus. And He will stay with us, at rest or at work. The peace of knowing Jesus, of having welcomed Him into our lives. That is the one thing needed.