

St Pius & St Anthony 16th Sunday Ordinary Time Year C(2025) Luke

Martha and Mary: What a down-to-earth story with Jesus! So real to life! I don't mean to meddle through any emotional baggage of the family dynamics of Martha & Mary or to psycho-analyze the sisters, but this is a great family story of Jesus wishing to work things out among us and bring peace to relationships.

Hearing the story, I sense that it is not only the stove in the kitchen that is getting a little hot, but also, Martha, I think she's reaching her boiling point. But notice that Jesus is at home in this – he knows us. This is exactly what Jesus enters, our human experience, by taking on our human nature to redeem us.

I'd say, he walked right into this one. But the beauty of it is that He loves us. Even this little spat, this blow up between Martha and Mary, He loves each of them through it. Obviously, he has been to their home before, and he knows them very well – he is very comfortable among Martha & Mary. Here is another example of the bible portraying a little sibling rivalry that God can work through for us. So common, this is any family – a little tension between siblings. This is a common theme found throughout the scriptures. Yes, there's a little history to it

And Jesus walks right into it. Now I don't mean to feed any prejudices, but often people talk about 'national stereotypes' that may fit us or maybe not. For example, people say things like "the French are the best cooks" or "Italians are passionate" or "Germans are on time", or "Americans are loud" or "Australians are laid back". Well, there is another one, I'm after that that "Irish are pugnacious" Of course, my favorite college football team is the blue and gold, called the '**Fighting Irish**'! I don't know if you heard the story of the two Irish brothers that were leaving the pub (*another stereotype!*) walking home one night and they walk up on to a little melee in street. They intervene, but not to stop it, they ask, "Is this a private fight or can we join in?" Or how about what we hear from a British soccer fan that once said. "Oh I went to a fight the other night and a soccer game broke out!" (it's not the game, but the fight that draws in the fans).

Well, no surprise here, but human nature-what it is, in this bible story of Mary and Martha, we are drawn like Jesus into a little friction between sisters. I'm sure this is not the first dust-up between them. There's some history. Why do I think this? Well. Maybe I'm reading into this too much, but where is Lazarus? He is their brother and Jesus is such a distinguished guest at their home (John chaps 11 & 12 attest to this). So, he is noticeably absent when Jesus visits, unless we consider that he had been around earlier, and felt this Martha and Mary blow-up brewing, so he conveniently needed to go to the market!

Again, I suspect that this hot exchange between them had a build-up. I can imagine, while Mary sits cozily at the feet of Jesus, and Martha was sweating over the stove, I bet Martha sent some not so subtle signals that this was coming. I can see her in that kitchen chopping vegetables on a cutting board, and with every

rise in anger at feeling left out, sacked with chores, she brought down that knife against counter top a little harder each time, or retrieving a pan from the cupboard, she intentionally dropped it on the floor to rattle and bang, gently letting Mary who was working hard in the next room. And then, when a pan boiled over (beans burnt), she did too, and charged into the room to let it out.

But Jesus knows this and He loves them both. He is at home with them. And I like to point out how comfortable Martha & Mary are with Jesus. He's been to their home a lot. Mary's intimate comfort can be seen in how she sides right up to Jesus, at his feet closely, (*and we learn in John 12, that she also anoints those same feet lovingly*) and Martha's comfort is seen in her sharing all of herself—letting it all out. Yes, she exchanged lots of kind gracious words to Him, but she also trusts their relationship enough to honestly, and maybe even hurtfully share what's on her heart. She is sharing openly, even this rebuke, out of love.

And how does Jesus respond? Here is our true shepherd. He doesn't rebuke her for attacking them, or interrupting their prayer session, or point out her lack of attention to all he could do—she had to know/maybe saw miracles of Jesus multiplying bread/fish—that providing food was not ever a problem. Not a worry to blow up over. No, Jesus does none of that. As he had been teaching Mary, He now also gives Martha a lesson in love. With the deepest of care and concern, He says “Martha, Martha (*2 times naming her, which I see as an answer to her pitying herself twice, when she complained to him, “that Mary has left me by myself to do all the serving” Lk 10:40*) But He is also de-escalating & calming her. As if saying, “Martha we are going to work this out – I know your hard work - Yet, your anxiety and agitation are *getting the best of you*” (this refers to the ‘better portion part Jesus mentions that Mary has). He actually says, “There is need of only one thing” — That is His Presence. Again, it is as if Jesus is saying to her, “Martha, this angst and anger is not you—even if your beans burnt in the kitchen, I would **savor** having them for the love you put into serving them to me.” Jesus accepts Martha and even her edginess here, out of love, and he wishes to draw her in to His presence, introducing that one, only thing needed – the better part- and that is His peace – the peace He only can give to us. An unperturbable peace, Mary shows through out the reading. Notice she never utters a single word in this episode.

But how about more of this ‘one thing needed’ or ‘better part’ that Mary has chosen. What is that? I suggest we not fall into the trap of thinking that it is about any outward physical action. Some people claim Jesus is preferring prayerful sitting over, any active work of service here. He is not. The point (center) or message is not about preferring any physical posture or visible outwardness of Mary or Martha's actions. It is not physically sitting at his feet versus being in the kitchen. It doesn't matter **where** one is--one's position. No, it is about **how** one is – one's disposition. This ‘one thing needed’ that Jesus talks about, and the ‘better

portion' is about our inward receptivity to Jesus – not putting ourselves out but drawing ourselves in—to Him. That is the contentment Jesus wishes to communicate to us, with whatever we are doing. Sitting restfully at His feet or out on mission working – He wants us to have **His presence** about ourselves – His peace and calm serenity in whatever we are doing. And that no one can take from us. It is not whether one prepares the meal in the kitchen, or sits learning in the drawing room, it is more about knowing who you are doing it for: and that should always be Jesus not what we do, or what we don't do, but who is moving us inside. to do it. That means, it all starts with listening in our heart for Jesus' words- truly taking in His presence, and His peace will always come to us from that.