



The Word...

Jesus entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him.

She had a sister named Mary who sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak.

Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me."

The Lord said to her in reply, "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."

(Lk 10:38-42)

Pondering the Word ...

According to a quick internet search, the male counterpart to the name Martha is "Martinus." (The same search yielded an option, "Who would be the male version of Martha Stewart?" I didn't click on it so you'll have to find out yourself!)

One thing I've noticed in my work in spiritual direction is a marked shortage of men taking part. Those who do tend to be ministers or men who have jobs in ministerial settings. Of course, it's usually women who get the label of "multitasker," being concerned with too many things.

Even though Jesus is addressing his words here to a woman, we are all prone to overextend ourselves and forget the importance of prayer and reflection. I encourage all you anxious and worried "Martinuses" out there -- and you know who you are -- to set aside time for the only thing that can bring you peace. Choose the better part. Sit for a while at the feet of the Lord.

Living the Word...

"Too often we are so busy doing the urgent that we do not have time to do the important." Confucius

The past several years have ratcheted up the global anxiety level more than a few notches. Too much to do, not enough people to do it, and so much uncertainty and loss. Urgency has been the name of the game to the detriment of many important things in our personal and collective lives, and for the planet and the poor.

I encourage everyone to take time throughout the day to connect with God. Start with a simple affirmation about the love you and God share. If you have the time to sit with the daily Scriptures, don't just read them -- reflect and ponder: "What is God saying to me?" At mid-day, do a mini-examen to reconnect. Stop for minute and ask: "Where is God? Where am I?" Then at night, take few minutes to review the day from the standpoint of gratitude. (Remember, most of the hassles that frustrate us have to do with our blessings!) These practices may seem awkward or stilted when you first start, but over time, you will find yourself "praying always," being constantly aware of God's presence and peace. Then reach out from that peace to bring it to others.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Jul 18: *"You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you: Doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with your God."* (Mi 6:1-4, 6-8)

This is a favorite and oft-used quote but I wonder how often we consider what these three phrases mean in practical terms. **Reflection/ Provision:** What does "doing justice" look like in your life? When have you "done justice?" I assume that to love kindness, we first have to practice it. And walking humbly WITH God? Most of us are content following. "We are not worthy to walk WITH God!" can be a convenient excuse to keep our distance. But here's a tip: Doing justice and loving kindness are a lot easier when we walk humbly with God.

Tue, Jul 19: *"Who is there like you, the God who removes guilt...who delights in clemency?"* (Mi 7: 14-15, 18-20)

So God likes to forgive me. I'm happy I'm able to bring him such delight each day! God delights when we seek pardon for times we hurt ourselves and others. God's delight is greater when we use the grace of mercy to redirect our lives and to extend mercy to those who've sinned against us. There are situations when we are truly delighted to forgive, but sometimes we offer forgiveness begrudgingly. If we truly forgive someone, we are lifting a burden from our hearts as well. **Reflection/Provision:** Real forgiveness is freeing. Are you withholding forgiveness from someone? If they've made amends and you can't forgive, you carry the weight of the hurt, not them. How does it feel to release yourself and the other from that burden? Just delightful!

Wed, Jul 20: *"But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold."* (Mt 13:1-9)

Why does Jesus list the harvest amounts in reverse order? Normally, it would be "the good, better, best" list. Like so many of his teachings, Jesus turns things upside down to make us think differently. **Reflection/ Provision:** *"The last shall be first. The one who loses their life saves it."* I think Jesus is saying the small harvests, like the widow's mite, mean just as much, maybe even more, to God. If you struggle, thinking your gifts and good works are not enough, remember they come from the good soil of your soul, fed and blessed by the Spirit.

Thu, Jul 21: *"For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light we see light."* (Ps 36)

I love this imagery: *"In your light, we see light."* Things appear pretty dark these days. It can be hard to find any flicker of light, but if we allow God's light to fill our hearts, all of a sudden, we begin to see light all around us. **Reflection/Provision:** I've shared this image before: Two rooms separated by a solid door, one in total darkness, the other bathed in light. The door opens. The light always overtakes the dark without losing any of its own brilliance. There is a knob on both sides of the door. If you're in the dark, pray for the courage to turn the knob. If you are in the light, pray for the awareness and compassion to open the door. Welcome others into the light.

Fri, Jul 22: *"Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come."*

(2 Cor 5:14-17) This quote is present tense. It is a continual, ongoing process. Christ IS, not was, and calls us to embrace the newness of life! **Reflection/Provision:** Certain habits and ways of thinking can grow stale but we can't seem muster the energy to change. *Yet it is the call of a Christian to make Christ present here and now*, and that requires us to respond on new ways to the need in front of us. Remember the story of the Syro-phoenician woman -- she calls Jesus out of his sole focus on the "lost children of Israel" to minister to the wide world. How are you being called to change in order to make Christ present today?

Sat, Jul 23: *"Are you to steal, murder, commit adultery and perjury... go after strange gods, and yet come to stand before me in this house which bears my name, and say: "We are safe (to) commit all these abominations again?"* (Jer 7:1-11)

There's nothing that gets my ire up as much as people who sin unabashedly (and seemingly with impunity) who then show up at worship services on Sunday, only to go back and commit the same sins on Monday. (And, yes, there are times when I've been irate with myself!) Politicians, celebrities, religious leaders... the list goes on, as does the list of "strange gods:" power, fame, nationalism, excessive wealth. **Reflection/Provision:** God's mercy is boundless, forgiving us each time we return with a sincere heart. But the point of this mercy is to bring about a change of heart that, in turn, becomes evident in our actions. (Addictions can make behavior change very difficult, but God sees the desire of our hearts.) We all have "strange gods;" thankfully, most of them are not dangerous, but they exist nonetheless and can impede the sincerity of our worship. The next time you go to enter God's house, make note of your "strange gods" and pray to God for strength to let them go.