

Dcn. Jerry's Homily. July 17, 2022.

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Martha, Martha, Mary has chosen the better path. It is easy to look at this admonition of Martha as both a reminder that we should not be anxious and Christ wants us to be present to Him to talk with him. After all, talking with God is prayer, not just spending our time working for Him. Certainly I know that I have a tendency to be anxious and worry when I should just place my trust in Christ. There is also the implicit or unstated question that Martha poses to Jesus. I am doing all the work and Mary is getting all the attention. I do not know about you, but I can be a bit jealous or sullen at times when I do not think I am getting the recognition I deserve.

Things are bad in this post-COVID world. We have ongoing infections and inflation, war, shortages, political polarization and other global concerns. None of which we can control, and only some of which we can influence. Where can we get answers? Let's go back two thousand years, not to the time of Jesus, Martha and Mary but roughly two thousand years before that to the time of Abraham in today's first reading.

Abram has left his family in Ur, probably modern day Turkey or somewhere else in the Fertile Crescent. In other words, Abram had traveled a great distance to a foreign land as an old man, he was over eighty, because he had faith in God. Almost twenty years pass and God has given Abram a new name, Abraham. Abraham has a son Ishmael by his wife's servant, Hagar. But no son by his wife Sarah. In other words, no one to carry on his heritage. No one to create the great people whom God has promised him. And Abraham and Sarah are not getting any younger. He is over 100 and she is 90! God promises him a son by Sarah in the next year.

We have three snapshots in the first reading and the Gospel, Martha, Mary and Abraham who have invited God to dinner. They are each offering God something special at dinner. Each of these individuals exhibit incredible faith. Abraham has based his whole life, his whole fortune, his posterity on his belief that God would fulfill his promise. Martha and Mary show two sides of familial behavior. Is this the way we would act when Christ comes into our home for a meal? Are we people of action like Martha or people of adoration like Mary? Abraham showed that we should be attentive and merciful when we entertain God. Perhaps there are proper times for adoration and proper times for action.

Both of these stories, both of these preparations for a meal, are just part of the life of three people who interact with God. Just like this Eucharist, in which we are about to participate, this meal is just part of our story of interacting with God.

Immediately after this reading Abraham would continue to walk with God towards Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham negotiated with God to be merciful with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah if there were only a few good people in the cities. Later he was willing to sacrifice his son Issac at God's request. For Abraham, faith came first and to be faithful to God one has to be merciful to your fellow man and obedient to God in all things. I wonder how many of us get that equation right; merciful to our enemies and obedient to God no matter what even when it seems God's salvation from our sins is impossible..

Martha and Mary's story is more complex. We know they are friends of Christ, but in some ways they seem to reverse roles over time. In today's Gospel Martha may be bitter, wants recognition, wants help and is anxious. Whatever combination of emotions she exhibits she is not at her best. Mary adores Jesus, pretty good. But when their brother Lazarus dies, Mary is grief stricken at home and Martha is a woman of action and goes out and finds Jesus and begs him to do whatever he can for Lazarus. Then she goes and gets her sister Mary. Martha is pretty good.

Sometimes our greatest weaknesses are also our greatest strengths. We bring these strengths as gifts to the table. But we also bring our weaknesses. Lord have mercy. May we reflect on having the proper disposition. Martha was all action when Jesus came to dinner and she became agitated. When Lazarus died she was all action and prayed to Jesus and brought him to raise Lazarus from the dead. Mary was placid, by Christ's side when dinner was being prepared. When Lazarus died she was inactive until called by Martha. Abraham was always faithful, always attentive to the Lord.

We should have a strong faith as the base of all of our other characteristics. Then when we are battered by the uncertainties the world sends our way, we can reflect; is my fear or anxiety or greed leading me away from God. We can correct our course to get closer to and stay with God.

In today's divided world, we live with pundits pulling us in this direction or that; with pandemics and inflation, with war and threats of war and deep divisions within our country. Deep faith has never been more important. Like Mary, we need to rest in the Lord's presence. Like Martha, we need to take action to pray for God's intercession; to beg for his help and most of all, to accept that it is His way not my way.

Both today's story of Abraham's encounter with God and today's Gospel begin with an invitation to God by Martha and by Abraham to partake in a meal with us. Remember to invite God to our kitchen table. He wants to be an integral member of our family.

In a few moments Father John will institute the Eucharist. And in the Offertory and the Agnus Dei, we invite Christ to accept our unworthy gifts. Christ will come to us in a very special way in the Eucharist to transform our gifts into His body and blood. Let the gift of Jesus's body and blood strengthen our faith to be attentive and merciful like Abraham. May we adore and rest in His presence like Mary. May we take the grace He gives us and go out to proclaim the Good News like Martha.

God bless you.