

July 17, 2022
16th Week in Ordinary Time
Luke 10:38-42

[As they continued their journey,] 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.”

Background:

Last week’s gospel text ended with Jesus telling the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan. It was told by Jesus in response to a scholar of the law who wanted to justify himself and wanted Jesus to define who should be considered one’s neighbor. Luke places this account of Martha and Mary right after the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Often Mary and Martha are understood as representing two types of service or models of discipleship. Martha is seen as representing the active ministry, and Mary represents the contemplative ministry of prayer and study. While this line of reflection may be very helpful for many, it seems to miss what would have been most apparent to the people of Luke’s community. In the text, Jesus is welcomed into the home and company of two women without the protective presence of another male of authority. In Jesus’ day, it was very unusual for a woman to own property, and it would draw attention if unaccompanied women would have a male enter the house. Jesus ignores the norms of appropriate behavior and the expectation of maintaining separate and appropriate space in relationships between men and women. Traditionally men inhabited the public spaces, in the community and within the homes. Women were expected to stay separated, going to the well in the early morning, and otherwise remaining in the kitchen and the private places of the house.

In the gospel as Luke presents it, Jesus enters the house where Martha and Mary are present. It is possible that Lazarus is present, but Luke does not mention his presence. That is a detail that one might expect to be included, given the possibility of scandal for the people of the day. Also, the usual custom would have been for Lazarus to be the one to greet Jesus and sit with him, while the two women attended to the other duties of hospitality. Instead, Luke describes Mary as sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to his teaching, in the customary positions of a teacher and disciple. Martha is described as performing the traditional role of hospitality for women of the day and the traditional responsibilities of female disciples. Think of Peter’s mother-in-law who, when healed, as reported by Luke, “She got up immediately and waited on them.” (Luke 4:39b)

It is impossible to know what is motivating Martha to make her comment to Jesus, or why she did not address her concern to Mary directly. On another level, we have the story as Luke has placed it in his gospel, with the details of the situation that he has chosen to include, and without those he has chosen to exclude. The fact that Luke includes this encounter of Jesus with Martha and Mary right after he had told the parable of the Good Samaritan also seems to be significant and to add meaning to this short text.

Reflection Questions:

1. Have there been occasions when gender roles have affected others’ expectations of you or others? What was your internal reaction? What was your external reaction?
2. How do you live within a society and a church that has gender roles?
3. Do you think that by including this short text of Jesus’s visit with Mary and Martha, Luke was challenging the gender roles of the early Christians?
4. The fact that Jesus is willing to accept the hospitality of two women and Luke is able to record the incident in his gospel says to me...
5. When I hear in the gospel Martha complaining about what Mary is not doing, I am reminded of...

6. Does the fact that Luke has placed this story right after the parable of the Good Samaritan seem to emphasize certain qualities for you of this account?
7. Can you take some time now to talk with Jesus about how he responded to Martha and Mary in this account, perhaps especially any way you find yourself surprised by the account, or about your own relationship with God at this point in your life?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for July 17, 2022, the Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the terebinth of Mamre, as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot. Looking up, Abraham saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and bowing to the ground, he said: "Sir, if I may ask you this favor, please do not go on past your servant. Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest yourselves under the tree. Now that you have come this close to your servant, let me bring you a little food, that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way." The men replied, "Very well, do as you have said." Abraham hastened into the tent and told Sarah, "Quick, knead three measures of flour and make rolls." He ran to the herd, picked out a tender, choice steer, and gave it to a servant, who quickly prepared it. Then Abraham got some curds and milk, as well as the steer that had been prepared, and set these before the three men; and he waited on them under the tree while they ate. They asked Abraham, "Where is your wife Sarah?" He replied, "There in the tent." One of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son."

He who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord. One who walks blamelessly and does justice; who thinks the truth in his heart and slanders not with his tongue. Who harms not his fellow man, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor; by whom the reprobate is despised, while he honors those who fear the Lord. Who lends not his money at usury and accepts no bribe against the innocent. One who does these things shall never be disturbed.

Brothers and sisters: 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, of which I am a minister in accordance with God's stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the word of God, the mystery hidden from generations past. But now it has been manifested to his holy ones, to whom God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory. It is he whom we proclaim, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

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."
Excerpts from Genesis 18:1-10; Psalm 15:2-5; Colossians 1:24-28; and Luke 10:38-42

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for July 17th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel from Luke tells of Jesus being welcomed during his travels by Martha, who then busies herself with serving. Then she complains to Jesus that her sister Mary has left her to do the serving by herself, while Mary listens to Jesus at his feet. Jesus tells Martha, "Mary has chosen the better part; it will not be taken from her."

The other readings also have references to actions of welcome, and to finding or putting oneself in the presence of the Lord. In the first reading from Genesis, the Lord appears to Abraham, in the form of a visitor, with two others, as the day grows hot. Though he does not know who his guests are, Abraham invites them to rest, bathe their feet, and eat before going on. He has Sarah bake for them, and he waits on them himself. The Lord then says to him, "When I return next year, Sarah will have a son." Psalm 15 proclaims, "He who walks blamelessly and does justice will live in the presence of the Lord." In the second reading, Paul writes to the Colossians: "Christ's body is the church. Holy ones among the Gentiles, Christ is in you. We proclaim him, that we may present everyone perfect in him."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!