

Tuesday's Gospel: the One Thing Necessary

Gospel (*Lk 38-42*)

Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."

But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and

troubled about many things; only one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.”

Commentary

The Gospel for today's Mass reminds us of a brief but significant encounter between Jesus, Martha and Mary. Martha, our Lord's hostess, is agitated and worried about preparing everything as well as possible, while her sister Mary sits at our Lord's feet, listening attentively to everything he says. The story highlights the contrast between the external attitude of both women. Externally, Mary is close to our Lord, sitting next to him, listening quietly. Martha is far from our Lord, agitated and rushing around. Even when Martha approaches Jesus, she does so

by standing right in front of him, almost in an attitude of defiance.

The story is somewhat reminiscent of the resurrection of Lazarus (cf. *Jn* 11:1-44). There we see Martha as the restless one, confronting our Lord and finding it hard to listen to him. While Mary is calm, listening docilely and trustingly at Jesus' feet. In Saint Luke's text, Martha's only concern is to serve our Lord by meeting his immediate needs. Jesus takes advantage of the situation to instruct both women. It is not a question of external attitudes, but of the heart. We need to eat, but only one source of nourishment is essential: the words of our Lord, the words of eternal life, which shed light on the meaning of everything else.

Jesus comes to our house too. And we might think that the most important thing is what we can offer and tell him. But, in reality, the most

important thing is what he offers us: “the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (*Mt* 6:33), “the food which endures to eternal life” (*Jn* 6:27). The life of the body is important and usually we are able to take care of it. But what good is that life if one does not attain eternal life? Jesus does not make a judgment about our works but about the attitude with which we do them. He asks us that our deeds be an occasion for true dialogue with God and that we know how to discern their true importance.

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