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Meditations: July 29, Saint Martha

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on the feast of Saint Martha.

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- Saint Martha, Jesus' friend
- Knowing that God is in our house while we are working
- Filling our work with love

EVERY TIME JESUS passed by the village where his three friends lived He felt the need to visit them. The

spontaneity with which the evangelist Luke narrates this scene highlights the deep trust between our Lord and the three siblings from Bethany: Martha, Mary and Lazarus. There was no need to announce his arrival, nor to worry about bringing a gift. Jesus knew He was always welcome and that his friends were happy simply with his presence and the opportunity to show Him their affection. The gospel tells us that Martha received Jesus when He entered the house. It is easy to imagine her emotion on seeing the Master arrive. But her joy was also accompanied by a certain nervousness. As a good householder, Martha wanted her friend's stay to be as pleasant as possible, so she quickly gets to work. While He is speaking, Martha follows the customs of every hostess: she provides water to purify his hands, brings a little oil to anoint his head... She also does everything possible to

ensure that the meal is prepared on time and that nothing is lacking. That is how she tries to show her love for our Lord.

But the effort her work entails begins to overwhelm her, and she becomes more and more agitated. As Martha continues striving to serve, she comes to the obvious conclusion that if her sister Mary were helping her, everything would be much easier. But she sees Mary seated at our Lord's feet. So Martha decides to confront Jesus: *Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me* (Lk 10:40). Martha could have quietly approached her sister, trying not to be noticed, and asked for her help. Instead, she chose to address the Master openly, "even feeling that she has a right to criticize Jesus."^[1] But, in the end, this is just another sign of her great trust in our Lord; there is no need to camouflage what one

thinks with a good friend. We can ask Saint Martha to help us have that same familiarity with Jesus, to show ourselves as we are when we talk to Him, although sometimes this is the opportunity for the Master to show us a better way to live.

JESUS does not respond to Martha's frustration with harsh words. He knows her good intention. So, as a sign of special affection, he repeats her name twice: *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 (Lk 10:41-42)*. Our Lord doesn't reproach Martha for doing something wrong. Nor does He invite her to sit at his feet, like Mary, and forget about her duties of service to others. Without her effort, how could those

accompanying Him have eaten and rested from their trip? The change He asked for was mainly internal. He invited Martha to carry out her chores with a different attitude.

Martha was doing many things, but she had forgotten the most important thing. Jesus was in her house and perhaps she wasn't listening to his words.

Often during the day, we can feel overwhelmed like Martha. Perhaps we think that our work or family obligations make it impossible to find time to speak with God. But Jesus does not suggest that we set aside our duties. As with Martha, He invites us to find Him in those very occupations, to carry out each job knowing that our Lord is always in the "house" of our soul. Thus work can become an unbroken act of love, a continuous "I love you" that goes beyond what we can repeat with our lips or with our thoughts. "Words are

not needed,” Saint Josemaría said, “because the tongue cannot express itself. The intellect grows calm. One does not reason; one looks! And the soul breaks out once more into song, a new song, because it feels and knows it is under the loving gaze of God, all day long.”^[2] —

IT WAS NOT the work itself that distracted Martha from Jesus. Her holy eagerness to offer Him a warm and restful welcome ended up making her tense and upset because she couldn't achieve everything she wanted to. She had lost sight of the aim of all her actions. Perhaps she was carrying out all those deeds of service as she would have with any other guest. But Jesus encourages her not to forget what is truly important: God was in her house. She wasn't simply fulfilling her duties as a

hostess; she was trying to help our Lord rest. “The problem is not always an excess of activity, but rather activity undertaken badly, without adequate motivation, without a spirituality which would permeate it and make it pleasurable. As a result, work becomes more tiring than necessary, even leading at times to illness. Far from a content and happy tiredness, this is a tense, burdensome, dissatisfying and, in the end, unbearable fatigue.”^[3]

All of us who are striving to find God in the middle of the world can have the same experience as Martha. We have many tasks in our hands that require our attention and constant effort. All this, of course, causes fatigue. But when we realize that all that work has a greater meaning than we at first intuit, it is more difficult for this fatigue to take away our peace, because we know that our success cannot be measured by

human parameters. In our personal dialogue with God we can rediscover that everything we do is aimed at growing in love for Him; that we take charge of this world because it is his. Thus we won't act simply out of inertia or because of what circumstances dictate, but because we are striving to find the hidden God in everything we do. "Without love, even the most important activities lose their value and give no joy. Without a profound meaning, all our activities are reduced to sterile and unorganized activism. And who, if not Jesus Christ, gives us Love and Truth?"^[4] And who can we ask to intercede for us in our effort to love God in our daily work if not our Mother Mary?

^[1] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 18 July 2010.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 307.

^[3] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 82.

^[4] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 18 July 2010.

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