

SUNDAY PLUS

The one thing necessary

Only one thing is needed

By Fr Denis McBride
C.Ss.R.



Jesus with Mary and Martha. KUCO / Shutterstock.com

In telling the story of Jesus' visit to his women friends in today's Gospel, Luke underlines the importance of the guest: Martha addresses Jesus as Lord, while Mary sits at the Lord's feet. This is not a casual visit. In response to Jesus' presence, Martha becomes fully engaged in preparing a meal while Mary becomes fully engaged in listening to the Lord. The scene of Mary sitting with her guest is a world away from the religious practice of the day: women were not instructed in the Law by the rabbis because they could be neither a teacher

nor a disciple. But the word of Jesus is for men and women: so Mary adopts the disciple's posture.

Martha, however, thinks that her sister should be doing something more important than listening to Jesus and she asks him to tell Mary to help with all the serving – in which case Jesus can sit alone and talk to himself! But Jesus is not allowing Martha to write his script, for he regards Martha as a woman who bustles her way into distraction. She is anxious about so many things that she cannot focus on the real priority of the moment. In all her fret and fuss Martha is missing the one thing that is needed now: to welcome the Lord by listening to the word that he speaks.

Jesus is not diminishing the importance of Martha's kindness in preparing a meal. Rather, he is supporting Mary's kindness in listening to him. Sometimes people need a receptive ear more than a tasty bite.

Fr Denis McBride's many books, CDs and DVDs are available from Redemptorist Publications, www.rpbooks.co.uk


Martha and Mary

"Martha and Mary are two sisters; they also have a brother, Lazarus, but he does not appear on this occasion. Jesus is passing through their village and, the text says, Martha received him at her home (cf. 10: 38). This detail enables us to understand that Martha is the elder of the two, the one in charge of the house. Indeed, when Jesus has been made comfortable, Mary sits at his feet and listens to him while Martha is totally absorbed by her many tasks, certainly due to the special guest.

We seem to see the scene: one sister bustling about busily and the other, as it were, enraptured by the presence of the Teacher and by his words. A little later Martha, who is evidently resentful, can no longer resist and complains, even feeling that she has a right to criticise Jesus: 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me'. Martha would even like to teach the Teacher! Jesus on the other hand answers her very calmly: 'Martha, Martha', and the repetition

of her name expresses his affection, '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'. Christ's words are quite clear: there is no contempt for active life, nor even less for generous hospitality; rather, a distinct reminder of the fact that the only really necessary thing is something else: listening to the word of the Lord; and the Lord is there at that moment, present in the Person of Jesus! All the rest will pass away and will be taken from us, but the word of God is eternal and gives meaning to our daily actions."

Pope Francis

Loving Lord, please let me never be too busy to hear the unspoken cries for love and attention in the hearts of the people who are part of my everyday life. Let me share with them my time and your compassion.  Amen.

Feast of the week
Friday 22 April

St Mary Magdalene

This Sunday's Gospel refers to Mary of Bethany and, a few days later, we celebrate the feast of St Mary Magdalene, the "apostle to the apostles" and the first witness to the resurrection of Jesus.

As friends of Jesus, the two women who shared the same name possibly both saw Jesus call Mary of Bethany's brother Lazarus from the tomb. A short time afterwards, Mary Magdalene stood at the foot of the cross with Mary, the mother of Jesus, John and a small group of women. She helped to prepare his body for burial and then, on Easter Sunday morning, met her risen Lord as she sat before the empty tomb, weeping in despair, convinced that thieves had stolen his body.

Tradition suggests that, after the ascension, when John set up house in Ephesus, Mary Magdalene also travelled there, as a companion to Our Lady, for whom she would care for the rest of her life.

Today:
Genesis 18:1-10
Colossians 1:24-28
Luke 10:38-42

Monday:
Micah 6:1-4, 6-8
Matthew 12:38-42

Tuesday:
Micah 7:14-15, 18-20
Matthew 12:46-50

Wednesday:
Jeremiah 1:1, 4-10
Matthew 13:1-9

Thursday:
Jeremiah 2:1-3, 7-8, 12-13
Matthew 13:10-17

Friday:
Song of Songs 3:1-4
John 20:1-2, 11-18

Saturday:
Jeremiah 7:1-11
Matthew 13:24-30

Next Sunday:
Genesis 18:20-32
Colossians 2:12-14
Luke 11:1-13