



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

16th Sunday Year C

Mary has chosen the better part; it is not to be taken from her

Readings: Genesis 18: 1-10, Ps 14, Colossians 1: 24-28, Luke 10: 38-42

It is a very short story in the Gospel yet one that most of us recall.

We've probably seen the bumper sticker, 'Look busy, Jesus is coming!'

As fallen human beings we know that activity is what you do to impress the boss so we figure that the same frantic deception will be sufficient to fool the Boss of Bosses, God. Dumb as.....

This being our default mode of thinking it is no surprise that the visit of Jesus to Martha and Mary's house is one of those moments when, I suspect, our human reaction is to think that if Jesus is not plain wrong then He is at the very least being unfair.

Martha welcomes Him into her house and, like a good host, sets about making this very important guest really welcome – tea in the best china, Duchy Originals on the saucer, crust free cucumber sandwiches, doilies on the cake stand and PROPER serviettes.

While she is rushing around doing all these vital things, her gloopy eyed sister, Mary, has parked herself at the Lord's feet and is adoringly hanging on His every word.

Martha is obviously less than thrilled, no doubt because she is also trying to cook a dozen pasties for the motley crew that regularly tag along with Jesus. Frustrated and probably desiring to give her idle sibling a good slap, she appeals to Jesus sense of fairness.

‘Don’t you care that I’m having to do everything? Tell that lazy good for nothing sister of mine to get off her fat butt and help.’ (I quote roughly from the ‘Free and Easy Idiomatic Translation’)

Jesus doesn’t play ball. He tells Martha that Mary has chosen ‘the better option’. I don’t think Martha was in any doubt about that in the first place. Jesus tells Martha that she worries too much about the unimportant things. You can almost hear her thinking,

‘You say that but I bet there’d be a lot of disgruntled lads if someone wasn’t ferrying victuals from the kitchen just now.’ Our instinctive sympathy is with Martha. She would like a little appreciation not a little correction.

We understand that feeling and that is why we sympathise. When we busy ourselves for Jesus we would like to think that He is impressed and grateful. Yes? That is Martha’s problem.....and ours.

Her instinct to serve Jesus is wholly good. Unfortunately she has not done the one thing needful first. Mary has. Mary has knelt at His feet and listened to His every word. She has simply revelled in His Presence and sought to be instructed by Him.

That is the needful pattern of Christian life. We can, with a terrific sense of righteousness and self justification, set about doing things for Jesus without

having knelt before Him, adored Him and listened to His words. But only if we have done these things can we really have an inkling of what it is He truly wants us to do for Him.

Martha is a busy person. She gets things done. That is good but... her doing is uninformed. She is not wrong, she has just missed the point. It is, in the end, a question of priorities.

Years ago, in my golden youth, we used to give a lot of parties. Friends would gather and have a wonderful evening. Hours of preparation, hours of serving, hours of clearing up went into these bunfights. It took me years to realise that I was so busy making the party happen that I had actually missed the party and spent very little time with all those people I was fond of and had so looked forward to seeing. Wrong priorities.

The same thing can affect those of us with jobs in church. We can get so wrapped up in the tasks that we forget the key business of kneeling, adoring, waiting on Jesus. We can be so busy serving that we forget to worship. Whether we do flowers, music, serving, welcoming, coffee, collections, we need to focus on the priority. All the jobs are important but they are only important insofar as those doing them have first focussed absolutely on Jesus.

We might raise money for CAFOD, support the children going to Lourdes, be conscientious members of SVP or Catholic Women's League. All worthy activities but if they do not flow from our attention to and love of Jesus they are just so much bustle.

Like Martha we want Jesus to appreciate what we do for Him. Brothers and sisters that is the wrong way round. We need first to appreciate what He has done for us. We want Jesus to notice us. He does. But He would rather notice us doing the things He has asked us to do rather than the things we would like to busy ourselves doing 'for Him'.

We want Jesus to love us. Brothers and sisters, He does. We don't have to do anything to earn that. That is a fact. Our response can only be to love Him back.

The busyness of the world is vanity. If Jesus simply asks us to put all our busyness and distractions away and give Him our undivided attention that is because true love demands no less. When we have done that we will begin to see, with Mary, the one thing necessary from which all our subsequent activity will flow. We worry about so many things, like poor old Martha, yet the only thing that can assure our destiny is our undivided devotion to Jesus. Everything else, in life and death, is small beer.

When we do that we will not lack things to do for the Kingdom but they will be His things not ours.

KNEEL.....ADORE.....LISTEN TO HIS WORD...

REVEL IN HIS PRESENCE.

That is the real business of the Kingdom –

Worship transformed into action.

It is no accident that this is the pattern of the Mass.