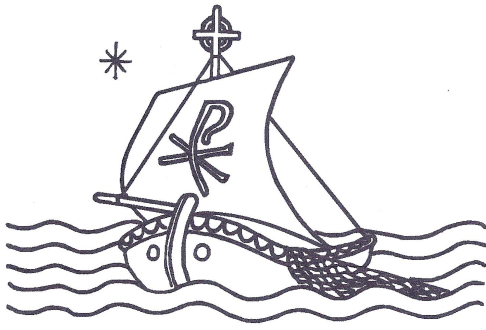




Homily by Fr Robbie Low

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

Martha and Mary

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

It is hard, for most of us, not to feel a sneaking sympathy for Martha and perhaps even a deep but unexpressed resentment to Mary. On the whole we prefer 'doers' rather than the overtly pious whose devotion seems to be, at best, a tacit rebuke to our own spiritual inadequacy or, at worst, a navel gazing self- obsession and evasion of regular duties and hard work.

Unfortunately, as I so often the case, Jesus does not seem to agree with our assessment of the situation. We may argue that He has not quite grasped the political dynamic between the two women. That alone would enhance His qualifications as a typical man. We may, if we were being very bold, suggest that a typical man may even prefer the adoring attention of women to his other major priority of food. We are simple creatures .

But let us be very bold and assume that Our Lord and Saviour is correct and that His insight is more profound than our gut analysis of the situation.

Martha is busy making everything ready for Jesus. Normally, one supposes, that Mary would be expected to assist in this. She does not

but rather parks herself at the foot of Jesus and hangs on His every word. Martha bustles and sweats to get ready to feed the Lord and His travelling gang and has no time to 'pretty up' and look gooey-eyed at Jesus. It's not fair.

Well, let's look at it a moment from Jesus' viewpoint.

It is, let me say at the outset, not that Martha is doing something wrong. Jesus does not tell her off. He does not interrupt His teaching to say, 'For goodness sake, woman, put that tray down and come and listen to me.' Indeed He only says anything in response to Martha's complaint about her 'lazy' sister. He simply says that Mary has chosen the better part. He notes that Martha is in a flap and worried about all sorts of minor details that, in the end, do not matter.

And that is the key phrase'in the end'.

There are, of course, many things that we too worry about both in service of ourselves and in the service of others and in the service of the Lord. And each of these things may be either genuine cause for concern or simply be the fuss and bother of habit.

What matters is 'in the end'.

We, who are here, are, like Martha, I hope, keen to serve Jesus. And many of us have 'jobs' to do in the Church and her ministry and mission. What we are often in danger of doing is 'a Martha'.

We are so busy serving Jesus that we are rushed off our feet and, frankly, too busy to shut up, sit down and listen to Him.

We know what He wants. We know what He needs of us.

In prayer we can be ludicrously dismissive, inadvertently, of His real and immediate requirements of us.

Jesus starts to speak to us in prayer time. We reply, 'Sorry, Lord, I haven't got time just now.....I'm up to my eyes in doing your business. I've got endless jobs to finish. I'll talk to you later.

We think we know what Christ wants and therefore we expect to get on with it without interruption – even from Jesus Himself.

We are Marthas, chasing our tails for Jesus without having heard what He has to say. I pray to Him but don't have time to wait on His reply.

I find this frequently at the end of my office. I have read the prayers and Scripture, done my job, ticked the box then have to hurry out to do things

for Jesus. There didn't seem to be time or inclination to stop, shut my mouth, open my ears and wait on His word. I am too busy doing His work to listen to His instructions. 'Just a minute', the Lord of all time and all eternity, cries out. 'Don't worry, Lord, I shout over my departing shoulder, I've got this covered for you.' I reply from my little mortal span of time.

Absurd.....but real life.

Our work is important, sure. It is noble and right to want to serve Jesus as best we can. But it is also true that we do this best when we have just put everything else on one side, closed our mouths and opened our ears and sat at His feet, all cares banished for those precious moments, listening intently to His Word and gazing on Him in love and admiration. Mary is not idle. Rather she understands the priorities of Jesus and they must be ours too. If we are to truly serve Him we must FIRST wait on Him as Mary did before we can productively wait on Him as busy Marthas.