

In our gospel today, we hear about Jesus and the apostles stopping at the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, their friends. They lived in a small town called Bethany, kind of a suburb of Jerusalem, just two miles outside of the big city. Jesus was accustomed to stopping there on His way into our out of Jerusalem for the many religious festivals He attended there. The event portrayed in today's gospel must have occurred many times in Jesus' life.

As Jesus rested from His journey, Martha and Mary take different tacks in offering their hospitality. Martha concerns herself with preparing some food, making sure that her guests have something to eat after their long journey. Mary concerns herself with spending time with her guests as she sits at the feet of Jesus listening to Him speak.

Traditionally, the actions of Martha and Mary in our gospel today have been interpreted as representing the two different aspects of our lives as followers of Jesus: the active life of work, done for the good of the Lord, and the life of prayer, sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His words to us. The actions of Martha and Mary in our gospel today are in a certain sense representative of two different sides of the same coin.

Jesus reveals to us that both of these actions are a necessary part of our lives. No matter what our vocation might be: whether God has called us to be a priest or religious, a mother or father, a doctor, lawyer, farmer, or ditch digger, we are called to do our work in the same spirit of Martha today: to do it for the Lord. Whatever we find ourselves spending our time doing everyday we can do it first of all as a way to serve God. All occupations, no matter what they might be, allow us the opportunity to put into practice the spiritual virtues of charity, service, mortification, joy, friendship. When it comes to finding satisfaction and fulfillment in our work this is what really matters: to find Jesus in the midst of our daily concerns. To work not only for ourselves, but to work also for the Lord: who is present in the ones we serve.

We can't ignore the example of Mary, however, who places herself in prayer at the feet of our Lord, listening to His words. Jesus seems to imply in today's gospel story that this is at least an equally, if not even more important, aspect of the spiritual life. Mary is the model of prayer. She has chosen "the better part" Jesus states. We seem to think to ourselves that the most important thing is to be actively working for the faith: and indeed this is important for us, but we must also heed the words of Jesus: our actions must be accompanied by a deep sense of prayer.

We, gathered here today, represent the Church as Mary: sitting at the feet of our Lord, attentively listening to His word to us. We must go forth from here as Martha, committed to doing what we need to do all week long to serve Him in one another.