

Brothers and sisters,

The Gospel reading we just heard has a tendency to upset a lot of people. I think we've all been in a situation where we were working hard at something, and looked off to see someone else, someone we thought should be working, slacking off. We are working on a big presentation for work, and John's out getting coffee, or we have a group project for school, and Susie is on her cell phone calling her friends while everyone else is working. It annoys us, doesn't it. It makes us angry.

So often when we read this passage, we tend to a little vexed, a little upset with Jesus. And it's precisely because we've all had that experience. Here Martha is slaving away in the kitchen, and Mary is just hanging out with the guests. And we tend to sympathize with Martha don't we? Again, because we've all been there, we've all been in situations where we've been overwhelmed with work while someone else seemingly wasn't carrying their weight. So we become a little indignant when Martha comes to Jesus to and asks Him to tell Mary to get back to work, and Jesus replies, "I'll do no such thing."

This shocks us, doesn't it? It doesn't seem fair, it seems unjust. So let's take a look at what is going on here, and see if we can come to some insight as to why Jesus would respond to Martha in this way.

Now, to begin, let's put this passage in it's larger context. Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem, and is passing through Samaria, which is a hostile territory for a Jew. And as usual He has been preaching, both to eager and hostile crowds. He just told the parable of the Good Samaritan, which we heard last week. And then he comes upon this house where two sisters offer him hospitality.

Okay, here's where the story gets interesting. Martha, assumes that what is necessary is the production, the show. Let's have food and drink. But Mary takes a much different approach to receiving Jesus. Mary isn't being lazy, as perhaps Martha assumes; Mary is being hospitable in a different manner. Her method is to welcome Jesus and to listen to him. Martha is in the kitchen worried about serving Jesus, and providing him with food. But Mary's approach is different. Rather than serving food to him, rather than giving him something, she is attentive to him, and receives something from him. Martha is worried about nourishing Jesus, whereas Mary is concerned with being nourished by Jesus.

To be clear, Jesus does not condemn Martha. No, not at all. But he does make clear what her priorities should be. Martha is so occupied with her wanting to nourish Jesus, that she misses the opportunity to be nourished by Jesus. What Jesus is telling us is that it's fine go off and nourish others, but the better part, is to be nourished by Jesus.

Friends, this is an important spiritual principle. The notion that our being nourished by Christ takes priority over our nourishing Christ. So often I think we get caught up in nourishing Christ at the expense of being nourished by Christ. And this makes a lot of sense, especially since we live in an outcome oriented society, where we value people for what they can do, rather than for who they are, right? A person's worth is often evaluated by society in terms of what that person can do. And this attitude, which I find very problematic as a Christian, seems to have crept into our spiritual lives as well.

People will often come to me wanting to do something for the Church. They want to be active like Martha, and nourish the body of Christ. And that's great. We need people to help out. This parish wouldn't run without volunteers. Our Church needs people to witness to the gospel by tending to the needs of the Body of Christ, by working in soup kitchens, by assisting at hospice, by visiting those in prison. But more important than our work to nourish the body of Christ is our being nourished by Christ.

See, Mary got that. She knew that she needed to be nourished by Christ. In that particular moment she knew that she needed to be attentive to Christ, to the Word of God. I often think this is missing from a lot of our theology today. I often wonder if we've become so intent on doing the work of God, on serving the body of Christ that we forget that we first need to be nourished by Christ, we need to be attentive to his word before we can go about his mission to serve. Pope Benedict warns of this in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, where he observes that every time humanity has attempted to do works of service in the world, without first being nourished by the Word of God, it's resulted in tyranny. And he points to Marxism, Communism and National Socialism as prime examples of what happens when we try to go about doing God's work without first being nourished by His Word.

So what do we need to do? Well the other day I saw an interview by Fr. Rosica, who many of you know, grew up here in our parish. He was interviewing, Fr. Bob Barron, one of my seminary professors whom I consider a friend. And the two were commenting on how we need a more kneeling theology – a notion that came from the Swiss theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar. At the center of this kneeling theology that they were discussing is that we need to make listening to God a priority in our lives.

Friends how often do we do that? How well do we do it here, in this parish, at Peace of Christ. The problem we face living in a culture that is so focused on doing is that we rarely take time to listen to the word of God and to sit in quiet prayer. I am as just as guilty as anyone else. But we need to do this. And we need to do it well. Prayer can't simply be one minute at the beginning of a meeting asking God to bless our endeavors. We need to move beyond that superficial prayer. It has to be deeper than that. It has to involve our listening to God.

I've often thought that maybe a good practice for our committees and staff would be to take 30 minutes or an hour at one meeting and rather than set our agenda for how we are going to serve the body of Christ, to have Eucharistic adoration, to simply sit in front of Christ as Mary did, and be attentive to His word and allow it to nourish us. (I know you guys are probably thinking, "What? You don't do that?" I may be giving away a trade secret, but we're not as holy as you think). And this is not only a good idea for parish meetings, but I think it is a good thing for all of us in our spiritual lives. Before we go out and attempt to nourish the Body of Christ, maybe we should take some quality time, and be still with Christ. Maybe we should come to church and sit in front of the tabernacle, or go to a quiet place at home, and pull out a Bible and sit quietly, attentive to the Word of God. If we do that, If we can develop this "kneeling theology" I think we'll find that we'll be better nourished and better equipped for our mission to serve the Body of Christ in the world.

Martha wasn't wrong in her desire to serve the body of Christ. But Mary chose the better part by choosing to first be nourished by His words.
Brothers and sisters, Peace to you and to all who are nourished by Christ.