

Eighth Sunday after Trinity

July 17, 2016

**Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
of**

**St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at**

St. Joseph Catholic Church

116 Theodore St.

Scranton, PA 18508

Scranton, PA

Luke 10:38-42

Martha and Mary in the Gospel today present us with a contrast that is very common in our own experience. On the one hand we have Martha, who is concerned about immediate needs and making those around her comfortable. On the other, we have Mary, whose desire is to learn to the benefit of her spiritual life, and the immediate needs can wait even if it does make those around her a bit uncomfortable. We see both types of people pretty regularly, so it's important for us to know why exactly Jesus says that the Mary model is the better one.

Martha's serving was not wrong, as the impulse to serve our guests is correct. But St. Luke tells us that she was "distracted with much serving," which means the focus had become not pleasing her guests but meeting her own expectations about how she thought her guests should be treated. Martha here is the woman who won't just sit down and enjoy her company for a while. Rather than take advantage of the time she had with Jesus, she spent the occasion thinking up ways to serve that prevented her from being really with Him for even five minutes. When she finally did engage the Lord in conversation, it was to ask Him to tell Mary to be as distracted as she.

Mary is commended because she takes the time to listen to her guest. As she sat at His feet and listened to Jesus, Mary showed that she appreciated the sacrifice of time that Jesus had made to visit. Only the crassest person comes over to another's house just to get a meal. Most people, when they visit, actually want to spend time with the people who are there. If the entire time of the visit is taken up with the host running around like a headless chicken, the guest begins to wonder why he came. If all He wanted was to be served, Jesus could have gone to a restaurant or an inn. What this Divine Visitor wanted was to spend time with the sisters, and only Mary understood this. Mary's choice was the better portion because she gave her attention to Him who had given His time. In giving of herself this way, she was at the same time able to receive.

Giving one's time and attention to guests is always the better portion, but this truth was magnified because of just who Mary and Martha were receiving into their home. Jesus is the Son of God, a reality that Mary and Martha would confess upon the death of their brother, Lazarus, an incident we read about in St. John's Gospel, chapter 11. Therefore, what the Way, the Truth, and the Life has to say to us is eminently more important than the refreshments we might be preparing for Him. Mary chose the better portion because she recognized better than Martha the importance of her guest. Mary dropped everything to be with Jesus, while Martha imagined for a little while that her will could take precedence. Mary chose Jesus' wisdom over her own.

That wisdom had to do with what we have eternally, as opposed to what we have only temporarily. Jesus told Martha that what Mary chose "...shall not be taken away from her." That is, Martha was concerned with feeding the bodies of her family and guests. Mary, on the other hand, was desirous to have her soul fed. She desired the sustenance that wells up to eternal life rather than that sustenance that merely enables us to live another day. As important as a meal is, it is not more important than what Jesus has to give us in order that we may live forever.

Martha and Mary then give us an idea of how we ought to prioritize our own attentions. The most important objective we have is to get to heaven. Therefore, that which would inhibit our salvation we must avoid, but more importantly, that which will aid in our attainment of eternal life we must choose. More than choose, we must make it first. In the same way we don't skip work because we need the material sustenance our paycheck provides, it makes even less sense to skip Mass because we need the spiritual sustenance more than anything else.

The paradox, of course, is that we need order in our lives in order to see this truth. The reason that Martha could receive Jesus' gentle rebuke, and the reason that St. Luke preserved this incident in his Gospel, is that they could take food and shelter and clothing for granted. Because they had all those things and could trust they would continue to receive them, Martha and Mary were able to recognize that, of course, listening to Jesus is more important than the spread we're able to offer in the dining room.

Disorder prevents us from seeing this simple truth. When we are scrounging for our next meal, wearing rags that might soon fall off, or homeless and buffeted by the wind, it is easy to imagine that the most important things are of the material world. We need order to allow us to contemplate what is true, good, and beautiful, what will last forever and never pass away. Chaos has the unfortunate effect of turning people functionally into atheists who do what they must to survive rather than do what they should so that they may be saved. It is our duty to work towards social order so that all our fellow citizens can contemplate the lesson of Martha and Mary and pursue that which is most important.

Therefore, we want to preserve order in the home so far as it depends on us. We can't permit chaos in our homes that could tend to turn our family members inward, thinking mostly about how to make it through another day. If chaos has already come, then we have to make the hard choices, the right choices, in order to restore order and make contemplation of the eternal verities possible.

But home is not the only place we need order. We need order in society, as well. We need leaders who understand the necessity of order so that our countrymen can work to attain what is truly best for them after they have had the peace which enabled them to contemplate it. Of all the distressing things I heard about the latest terrorist attack in France, the most disturbing was the assertion by President Hollande that the French people were simply going to have to get used to terrorism. He was essentially saying that his people would need to become accustomed to a disorder that will prevent them from contemplating the true, the good, and the beautiful. This is absurd, entirely untrue, and dangerous to the health of our souls. On this side of the Atlantic, to choose the good portion, as Mary did, must mean that we embrace only those leaders who want to give us a fighting chance to make the right choice, embrace only those leaders who don't want us to be distracted in order that we may hear clearly the Word of the Lord.