

## Martha and Mary

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God our Father,  
whose Son enjoyed the love of his friends,  
Mary, Martha and Lazarus,  
in learning, argument and hospitality:  
may we so rejoice in your love  
that the world may come to know  
the depth of your wisdom, the wonder of your compassion,  
and your power to bring life out of death.

Our text today may be found in Luke's gospel chapter 10 and verse 40:

'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself ?  
Tell her then to help me.'

Today is 17<sup>th</sup> July, just twelve days short of the 29<sup>th</sup> July when traditionally the Church remembers the friendship between Jesus and the sisters, Martha and Mary, and their brother, Lazarus. And today's gospel from Luke has one of those wonderful moments of tension, this time when Jesus and the Twelve are staying at their friends' home in Bethany and instead of helping Martha get the meal ready for them all, Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to what he has to say.

So are you a Mary or a Martha ? Are you happier to sit still, be still, listen, think, reflect, or do you prefer to be up and doing, busy, tackling the tasks that need to

be done when they need to be done ? Well today's situation is a classic conflict of the two positions. Jesus and the Twelve are staying overnight and they need to be fed. Now, the work involved in feeding at least sixteen would be a challenge to most folk so I can understand why Martha is hot and bothered that her sister has chosen to sit down and listen to Jesus rather than be up and doing, active, engaged in helping her get the food ready for them.

Indignant, Martha goes to Jesus to get him to tell her sister to do her duty, to do what is expected of a woman in that situation at that period in time. I wonder why Martha didn't simply tell Mary to get her act together, to stop sitting there listening to Jesus and get up off her backside and start working for Jesus. Perhaps Martha thinks that Mary will listen to Jesus more than to her older sister under stress ? Perhaps Martha is just making Jesus aware that she has been left to do all the work without the necessary help Mary should be giving her.

Now, this situation would be a challenge even to someone as wise as King Solomon and Jesus proves his worth by what he says to Martha. He starts by recognising Martha's true worth, the value of what she is doing for them: **'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things'** – how very true, multi-tasking to produce the necessary food, the hospitality for their friend, their guests. But he balances his recognition of what Martha is doing by affirming the value and rightness of what Mary is doing; **'there is need of only one thing: Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'** Being fed can be more than eating food – it can be hearing the word of God, our daily bread, and Mary is listening attentively to Jesus, hearing food for our spiritual life.

So I wonder how Martha felt when she heard what Jesus said to her ? Did they get a good meal that night ? Did Martha accept that what Mary was doing was okay just as what she was doing was right and proper too ?

I'd like to think that they ate a great meal that night together – food blessed by a labour of love and that Mary's blessing in listening to Jesus was translated into the way she loved her brother and sister.

I started by asking whether you were a Mary or a Martha. On reflection, perhaps it's not a question of 'either . . . or' but a statement of 'both . . . and' because, to be honest, we are not one or the other but a combination of the two. We should make time and space to do both: to be still and to be active. Don't you think there's something of a Mary and a Martha in us all ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

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G: Sermons 34 : Martha and Mary

