

One thing is necessary

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Sixth Sunday after Pentecost) is Luke 10:38-42. This is the story of Mary and Martha. Jesus ministry followed a pattern of travel that relied on people's hospitality as here at the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. They lived in Bethany which was about two miles from Jerusalem.

When it says Martha welcomed him into her house, we find the same word that Luke uses for Zacchaeus' welcome of Jesus into his home (19:6) What is unusual here is that a woman welcomes Jesus into her home, and that Jesus accepts her hospitality.

Augustine says, "She(Mary) sat at the feet of our Head. The more lowly she sat, the more amply did she receive. For the water flows together to the low hollows of the valley, runs down from the risings of the hill." (*NPNF* 1 6:430).

The word listening is an imperfect meaning "kept on listening." Matthew 28:20, too, reminds us that our learning is to be very intensive and continuous.

The literal meaning of "distracted" is "she was dragged around." This could suggest that Martha would rather not be working. She would rather be "sitting at the feet of the Lord," like Mary. Martha's burden is to show hospitality to Jesus. Since she alone is named as the one who "welcomed" Jesus in, perhaps she had assumed responsibility for showing hospitality.

Martha is not so much a personification of the Law as she is a vivid example of modern Christians trying to juggle all their obligations to God, family, friends, and others.

When Jesus says Martha, Martha he intones a combination of sympathy, sadness, impatience, and even exasperation. The double name signals that Jesus is about to say something important: "Martha, Martha. We're so near Jerusalem; we're so near the cross. This is my last journey. How long do you think you will have me with you? Is dinner more important than listening to some of my last words?"

When Jesus says "one thing is needful" he means listening to Jesus in his Word. This is not to be taken for granted by even the most ardent Christians. In the parable of the Sower the devil used the worries to take away faith. Many a new Christian who comes into the church with great enthusiasm can quickly be sidetracked and soon lose that faith. It can also happen to long time Christians who have been active and then slowly drift.

Prayer: O Savior, bear my anxieties and remove my distractions, that I may receive Your good portion for me. Amen. (TLSB)