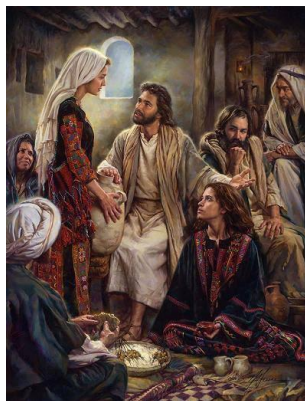




The Memorial of Saints Martha, Mary and Lazarus

Today is the feast of St Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Martha was the sister of Mary and Lazarus (the one who Jesus raised from the dead). Jesus was friends with this family and when Lazarus died, it was Martha who professed her faith in the Resurrection. It was Martha who made the great profession of faith (John 11), “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world”.

She is also the one who, in Luke 10, is distracted with all the serving and complained that her sister Mary was not helping her, but sitting listening to Jesus.

There has been much reflection, and even debate, on the response of Jesus when he said that Martha was fretting and anxious about so many things, and that Mary had chosen the better part and that it was not to be taken from her.

We can be quite sure that Jesus enjoyed the food that Martha had prepared. Indeed, is not feeding the hungry something that Jesus encouraged us to do?

Maybe it was not that Martha was working, but rather that she was worrying and fretting what Jesus was reacting to. Worry and anxiety fix nothing, fretting fixes nothing. We do not need to add worry or fretting to our work. We can still and quieten our soul even though we have a lot to do. We tend sometimes to make being busy a virtue. It can often act as a barrier between us and others who do not interact, or even ask for help, because they think we are busy! Mary was listening to the words of Jesus at his feet.

Can we still listen to Jesus as we go about our daily work? Can we still meet Him in the others and the events surrounding our activities and work?

Maybe the fretting and anxiety stop us from having a contemplative attitude to life.

Certainly, as we listen to the words of Jesus, we can still apply them to our daily living. Work is necessary for life. In the scripture St Paul says, “There are some among you who do not work and interfere in everyone else’s work. I order them to work otherwise they do not eat”. There is a beautiful story from the desert fathers.

A man came to the monastery and said to the Abbott that he did not work anymore but prayed all day. He had moved beyond such menial and worldly things. He asked for a place where he could pray. The Abbott pointed out a quiet room away from the main monastery and left him alone. All day went past and then all night and well into the next day. At last the man feeling very faint for not eating or drinking anything came out and searched for the Abbott. When he found him, he asked if the monastery was having a time of fasting. The Abbott said, “oh no”. The monk then asked why no-one one had brought him anything to eat and drink. To which the Abbott replied, that since he had reached such heights of contemplation and did not work, he obviously did not need to do such mundane things as eating and drinking!

With the Grace of God we can be contemplatives in action. Even in the midst of everyday life we can stay aware of the presence of God and listen to God through the events of life. It does not mean that there is not a place for having some time of silence. We can all benefit, and in fact need some time of silence.

There is a time to be still, there is a time to work, there is a time for many things under heaven.