

SUNDAY 16 – C
“Martha and Mary”
(Gen 18:1-10a; Psalm 15; Col 1:24-28; Luke 10:38-42)

There were three men pushing wheelbarrows loaded with stones. When asked what he was the doing, the first said he was pushing a wheelbarrow filled with stones. When asked the same questions, the second man said he was pushing a wheelbarrow filled with stones to make a living. When he was asked, the third man said with energy that he was helping to build a cathedral.

Walk in balance: Love God like Mary, and your neighbor, like Martha.

The context for this gospel is the previous Sunday’s gospel about the Great Command and the Good Samaritan. To get their full meaning, the two stories (the Good Samaritan and Martha and Mary) must be taken together.

The Great Command is to love God, and then others as we love ourselves. The Good Samaritan outlines what it means to love our neighbor, who is anyone in need. This story provides the balance by showing what it means to love God. Both together portray the ideal disciple – one who both loves God above all else, and loves his or her neighbor as they love themselves.

The characters Jesus chooses in these two stories adds an additional layer of meaning. A Samaritan, hated by the Jews, would never be considered by them as a good neighbor. And a woman would never be seen sitting at the feet of Jesus, as would a male disciple. The story of the Good Samaritan featured a “certain man” while Martha is introduced as a “certain woman”. The good Samaritan exemplifies the disciples “seeing,” while Mary exemplifies the virtue of “hearing.” Both the Samaritan and Mary, a woman, represent marginalized persons – unlikely heroes. As a composite they are model disciples: “those who hear the word of God and do it.”

In choosing these characters for his stories, Jesus was protesting against the narrow rules, boundaries and expectations that the Jewish culture set up to promote self-serving interests of those in power and control. Jesus was always taking the side of the poor and the excluded. We must also be careful to be open to the genuine needs of others regardless of social norms, and worship of our God regardless of the opinions of others.

Martha presumes to tell Jesus what he should do; Mary chooses to let Jesus tell her what she should do. By choosing to attend to Jesus’ teaching while laying aside everything else, Mary exemplifies what it means to “love the Lord your God with all your strength, and with all your mind.” As if to affirm Mary’s radical violation of Palestinian social roles, Jesus adds that what she has chosen “will not be taken from her.”

The summer before I was to be ordained, I received permission from my Oblate superior to participate in a 30 day silent retreat in Spokane. This was, in the word of the retreat master Fr. Armand Nigro, a honey-moon with the Lord. We were to be silent all day

except for a break on Sunday afternoon. Other than that we spoke to no one for thirty days except for our personal spiritual director for about 15-20 minutes a day. I spent most of the time outside in the hills and up Tower mountain. It was hard for me not to feel guilty, knowing that the rest of my Oblate community was working hard at putting on summer vocation workshops back in Saskatchewan. Nevertheless, this experience perhaps more than any other confirmed my call to be ordained a priest, and some of the spiritual experiences of that retreat have provided me strength, support and direction for all of my ministry. A month of being Mary prepared me for a life-time of being Martha.

Fr. Richard Doll OMI, pastor of St. Walburg in Saskatchewan, has a unique idea with regard to this text. He suggest that the next time, the two women agree to both sit and pray, then both serve!

Our greatest prayer, in which we respond to God's love made present in Jesus, by worshipping our God, like Mary, returning to him the gift he gave us, his Son. Our worship empowers us and missions us to go out to serve and care for others, like Martha.

So in the end, walk in balance: Love like Mary; work like Martha. Love God with all your heart, like Mary, and your neighbor, like Martha.