

PARISH OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL & ST SIMON STOCK, CARMELITE CHURCH
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16th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 17 July 2022

Mary or Martha, or Mary and Martha?

We are presented with two paths to God – one represented by Martha and the other represented by Mary – in today’s Gospel. Martha is engaged in active service of the Lord (preparing food and serving at the table) while Mary sat at the feet of Jesus listening to him. And when we hear the Lord’s response to Martha’s complaint that the sister has left her to do the serving all by herself, we are inclined to suppose that Mary chose the ‘better’ part, as our reading says.

Actually, Jesus does not use a comparative (‘better’) in his response to Martha. He simply says that Mary has chosen the ‘good’ part (which is how it is rendered in the Greek version). Although this does not entirely help matters, because if Mary has chosen the good part, then what should we call Martha’s part? Surely, it is not bad to serve!

Perhaps the figure of Mary and Martha has too often been used as representing two different styles of life – an active life and a contemplative life – which are somewhat opposed to each other or one is more elevated than the other. But we know that it is impossible for these two to be mutually exclusive. No active life or service is possible without a life of prayer; conversely, life spent in prayer without expression in love and care for other people is no life of prayer at all. The two go together: love and service of other people grow out of a prayer life; and prayer life is necessarily expressed through service of others.

Looking closely at the passage itself, precisely on Jesus’ response to Martha, we see that ‘the good part’ or even if translated ‘the better part’ does not refer to Mary’s action of sitting and listening to Jesus as different from Martha doing the service. Jesus’ comparative (if we must) refers to Mary not worrying about too many things as against Martha who is obviously worrying and complaining about Mary not helping out, whereas only one thing is important, which is what Mary chose (staying with Jesus and not worrying about other things). This aligns with what we hear Jesus say several times elsewhere: “do not worry about what to eat or drink ...”; “seek first the kingdom of God and every other thing will be given you”; “come to me all who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.” So Mary has chosen the good part because she is the one who has sought first the Kingdom of God (Jesus), and this is not to be taken from her. Martha could well have focused on her serving and not worry about other things, in which case she would be seeking the Kingdom of God through service.

We find in the story of Abraham and Sarah visited by three unknown men and example of keen attentiveness to God. We read that Abraham welcomed them. He sent Sarah to prepare food and the servants to prepare meat for the visitors who, unknown to them, were angels of God. Then he remained standing near them while they ate. After an impressive hospitality to the angels, Abraham and Sarah were promised a Son although they were well past the age of child bearing.

Perhaps in no one than the Blessed Virgin Mary do we find epitomized a keen attentiveness to God as well as a balance between active and contemplative life. She stands as a perfect model for us. As she is described in the Gospels, 'she treasured everything and pondered them in her heart.' And when we read the instances she was actively involved, it is full of love and care for others, for such is the fruit born from listening to the word of God. Let us ask our Blessed Mother to obtain for us the grace of an active listening to the word of God.

NOTICES

Registration for First Holy Communion

We are also now accepting registrations for the next group of children to prepare for First Holy Communion. Classes will commence in September. If you have children for first holy communion, please do register them ahead of September. Children must be 7yrs old by 31st August. The registration form is on our website www.carmelitechurch.org/activities/catechism-classes or simply email catechism.co-ordinator@carmelitechurch.org and request a form to be sent to you. Thanks

Encounter Festival

Our Carmelite Priory in Oxford is organising a weekend of encounter with self, God and others intended for those between 25 – 35 years old. The Encounter Festival is meant help you discover God as a dear friend and deepen your prayer life as well as find others to walk alongside you on the journey. Date is 29 – 31 July 2022. For registration and programme details, please visit the website www.carmelite.uk.net/retreats/encounter-festival/

Feasts this Week

Wednesday, 20 th	Feast of St Elijah (Carmelite Feast)
Friday, 22 nd	Mary Magdalene
Saturday 23 rd	St Bridget of Sweden (Patroness of Europe)

<u>Collections Last Sunday</u>	Offering	£1318
	Gift Aid Envelopes	£100

Thank you for your generosity

Fr. Thaddeus, OCD