

I received a plaque as a gift that has the inscription, “I will be handling all of your problems today and I do not need your help –signed God.” Apparently, the person that gave me the gift knows me pretty well. You see I have more than a little Martha in me. I’m not talking about the servant, get-it-done Martha. I’m talking about the Martha who is anxious and worried about many things. Don’t judge! Remember that Martha is a saint *too*.

“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things.” What is Jesus saying? Why is Jesus calling Martha out? Isn’t she doing the greater good by serving? Is Jesus belittling Martha? No, He is *teaching* and the lesson is once again on the Kingdom of God. Jesus, who is love, came to drive out fear, drive out worry, drive out anxiety... That’s what Jesus’ does, that’s what His mission was - to restore humanity to our former self. St. John who had spent much time at the “feet of Jesus”, writes in 1 John, “...perfect love drives out fear.”

Perhaps you too like me find it difficult to not be “anxious and worried about many things.” Why are we anxious so much? We do we worry so much? Perhaps it is partly due to the seemingly constant barrage of worldly cares that we encounter. Perhaps it is partly due to original sin? Perhaps it is partly due to our neglect of the 1st commandment – to love God with our whole heart, mind and with all our strength. *Jesus’ teaching message for us is that loving God is the priority in our life. Yes, it even becomes before serving.* When we make loving God our priority, we put correct order in our lives.

Focusing on Mary’s discipleship, her attentiveness, Jesus is reminding us that dealing with fear, anxiety and worry is *His* wheelhouse. He came that we may have life and have it to the full. He is reminding us that fear and anxiety have no place in the Kingdom of God. The same Kingdom of God that He wants each of us to be active participants in. Jesus turns Martha’s anxious plea (a little bit hostile hospitality) – her shortfall - into a teaching moment for her and for us. He teaches Martha and us what discipleship is about. Turning towards Mary, who is sitting attentively at His feet, He says that there is only one thing that is needed. “Turn your gaze towards me, then you will do even greater things”, Jesus says to you and I. It is “sitting at the feet of Jesus” that love for His Divine heart grows. It is where we grow more and more to trust in Him who loves us and wants the best for us. It is only when we are strong in the Lord that we can know and accomplish His work. It is only when we sit with the Lord that we begin to understand our true purpose in discipleship.

In another place Jesus says, “No one can accomplish anything apart from the Vine” (John 15:5). Only after we have sat at the feet of Jesus - by listening to His Word, spending time in receiving Him in prayer, receiving sacramental grace, adoration, etc. are we empowered and ready to share His love and healing with the world. Only then will we become a reflection of His love for others.

“From the top of a hill the rain flows down to the valley. Just as more water collects at the bottom of the hill, so Mary, sitting in a low place at the feet of Jesus, listening to His words, receives more than Martha, standing and serving the temporal needs of her Master. Mary, loving Jesus, the one thing needed, is in port. Martha, occupying herself about many things, is still at sea. –St. Augustine

Perhaps Mary was not even aware of her “neglect” of her sister ... Perhaps all she wanted to do is to be with Jesus....Perhaps for Mary it was “blind luck” However, Jesus teaches us that “sitting at His feet” is what He wants first from us. Jesus’ words are timeless because when we put Him before all else, we will have the right perspective in life and His vision will be our vision. When we meet His gaze, we will understand what a great gift discipleship is. Will we let him heal our anxiety and worry? My plague doesn’t say if you love God you will not have problems, but it does say that He will be handling them. Do I trust Him enough to let Him?

-Deacon Charles Bernhard, 7/21/19