

Martha and Mary

As a kid I always felt bad for whatever priest was on duty when the story of Martha and Mary was read. My mom, without fail, made a beeline for that priest and proceeded to bend his ear about how Jesus had it all wrong. As you may have guessed, my mom is the Martha type. Lots of hustle and bustle. Taking care of this need, that child, this load of laundry, that client.

Perhaps some of you are like her in that way. A lot of priests collapsed in the face of my mother's indignation. But one did not. He said: "Jacque, it isn't about being busy OR being still, it's about being busy AND being still." That sent my Mom home thinking.

To understand what he meant, it helps to remember that last week's gospel, The Good Samaritan, goes hand in hand with today's gospel of Mary and Martha. These two stories, the Samaritan on the one hand and Martha and Mary on the other hand, are all about the tension we are called to live with as Christians.

It is the tension between a life of action and a life of quiet, of prayer. A tension between going out and doing and staying home and listening.

These two stories play off of one another. The Samaritan sees. Mary hears. The Samaritan is a social outcast, a most unlikely good neighbor. Mary, a woman, had no voice, no vote, she could not be a witness in court, simply because she was a woman. The Samaritan acted. Mary sat still.

In the interplay of these two stories, is much of our Christian faith. For starters, Jesus rejects all barriers between people based on class or gender or race or creed. To the pagan Roman soldier, he marveled at his faith; he had many women among his closest followers, something unheard of in that male dominated society. He welcomed tax collectors and Pharisees, prostitutes and priests. This is the way Jesus tells us to relate to one another.

There's no doubt that we still have a long way to go. Just the other day, our brothers in the Roman Church put the ordination of women on the same list of crimes as child abuse. We are assaulted every night with the Mel Gibson "goes crazy" tapes, not to mention the increasingly nasty tone of political discourse, both here at home and even more so on the mainland.

So much of the anger we experience is based on not getting what I want; or a fear of losing what I have. It is, in short, backward looking or forward looking that fuels anger, fuels anxiety. In the story of Martha and Mary, in the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus gives us a remedy for anger; for anxiety: "Be present in the moment."

To be present in the moment, sometimes requires action; and other times requires silence, requires stillness. Such are the lessons of the Good Samaritan and of Mary.

It is to nurture a stillness at our core, a sense of peace, of calm. It is in that calm that we most easily hear the quiet voice of God.

Our call is not so much to search for God. God has already found us. Our call, according to our fathers and mothers in faith, is to learn to obey God.

Obedience has a tough time in our liberated, individualized, secularized, me-worshipping world. We often think of obedience as becoming something less. But obedience to God only makes us more: more free of useless anxieties, more free to let go of our fears and embrace one another, more free to become who we are born to be: sons and daughters of the living God.

Paul tells us today “Jesus is the image of the invisible God.” Let that sink in for a moment. “Jesus is the image of the invisible God.” When we hear Jesus, we hear God. When we watch what Jesus does, we see God in action. What might this world be like if we who claim Jesus as Lord really had faith in that, and put that faith into action?

We are called to obedience. We are called to listen. We are called to stillness.

It is into this stillness that we shall baptize young Keira. Baptism is not a magic ticket into heaven. Baptism is the entryway into a new community. A community that strives to live at the frontier of the Kingdom of God. A community that, all together, strives to develop a taste for, a familiarity with, even a longing for, the food and drink of the Kingdom of God. That food is compassion. That drink is forgiveness. And it is within this community that you parents, you godparents, and we the congregation, promise, with solemn vows, to raise this child.

For in this community, she will come to know God. As she grows, teach her that our faith is not about action OR being still. Teach her that it is all about action AND being still. For in the midst of that tension, is the God who lives among us.

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