

The village that Jesus enters in today's Gospel is named "Bethany". It is two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus is a frequent guest here as He travels back and forth from Galilee to Jerusalem. Jesus and the disciples stop frequently at the home of Martha and Mary, two sisters, in order to rest and to have a meal.

So we have that scene here in the Gospel reading of Jesus and the disciples stopping here on their way to Jerusalem. Martha, who seems to be the older of the two sisters, is busy getting things ready. You can imagine that there would have been a lot to do. 13 people to feed and probably they were unannounced. So Martha is scrambling to get things together. It's no wonder she is a bit anxious and distracted. On top of this there is her sister, Mary, seemingly doing nothing but sitting there, and so Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to help her. Surprisingly, Jesus does not ask Mary to do that. In fact, He does just the opposite. Jesus kind of chides Martha.

So how are we to read this scene? Is Jesus saying that work doesn't really matter? What exactly is going on here? Well let's look at what Jesus is saying and also what He is not saying.

First, the straight message from Jesus to Martha is, "Martha, you are worried about many worldly affairs, but you are forgetting about Me. You are concerned with many important tasks, but you are forgetting about the most important one of all – union with God."

Mary was not simply doing nothing. She was sitting at the feet of Jesus and was soaking in His words and His presence, which leads to personal transformation and holiness. So this message is clear for all of us. We all have things that we have to do in life – work, taking care of the family, in the parish, doing this and doing that. All of this is good, but in the midst of all of this, if we neglect to sit at the feet of Jesus – to soak in His Word and His presence – then our work is not really pleasing to God because we are neglecting the most important work of all: union with God.

Now, what is Jesus not saying? He is not saying that our work doesn't matter or that we don't have to attend to it. Our work is an expression of love – for God, for others and for ourselves. If we would have the idea that God would want us to sit here in church all day every day praying, we would be very much mistaken. In fact, we would be lazy.

So what is God looking for here with us? God is looking for a union of our work and our prayer in our daily life: time at Jesus' feet every day without distraction, and that our work fits around that time in prayer and is filled with an awareness of God's presence as we work. God wants a union in our lives of Martha and Mary.

So we can look at our lives and ask if we are sometimes a little too much like Martha – overly busy with worldly concerns, anxious and distracted by all that needs done, neglecting prayer, neglecting spending time with God. If so, Jesus' message to Martha is His message to us: "Don't neglect the most important thing life – union with God." At the same time, we cannot be lazy – the work that we are called on to do is most important. And if we are praying like we should, our work then will be free of anxiety and distraction and our work itself will become an expression of our love for God and for others.

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on the 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time, 2016.