

OUR LADY, STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
21ST JULY 2013

Genesis 18:1-10 Psalm 15:2-5 Colossians 1:24-28 Luke 10:38-42

Haste is an enemy. It puts us under stress, makes us impatient, even blinds us to the needs of others. Ron Rolheiser talks of some research involving student priests – interview, at end invite to talk to classroom...walk across yard but very little time. Distressed actor en-route. As seminarian you'd think they would all stop – in fact the deciding factor was how much of a hurry they were in! Many spiritual writers warn of the risks of overwork. At the very beginning of the bible God invites us to keep a proper Sabbath. And for at least 1 hour – I hope if we reflect on today's message it will become more – we are “with God”.

The mystery, and indeed beauty of today's celebration is Christ among us as our friend. It's about us spending time with God.

Abraham really shows us how to look after friends. He is completely selfless in how he looks after his divine guests; and this is in contrast with the portrait of Martha in the Gospel.

Abraham is having a nice rest in the heat of the day by his tent but as soon as he sees the three men he runs to offer them refreshment, then hurries to find Sarah so she can make loaves and then runs to his cattle to find a tender calf to cook. And then, he serves them this meal and stands in attendance whilst they eat. Great hospitality but then of significance, he just stays in their company, attentive to what else they may need and listening to them – a bit like our altar servers!

Whilst Abraham is concerned only for his guests, Martha seems to be speaking for herself...do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do all the serving by myself. I reckon we are all a bit like Martha at times. And so Jesus gently rebukes her “Martha, Martha ****ask**** you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one”. Huge lesson for us here. There are so many things necessary in a family: cleaning, cooking, washing...BUT if we are so pre-occupied with jobs that we miss knowing our own brothers, sisters, children, perhaps we need to examine and change our focus. The one thing really necessary is being available for Jesus when he is present – and remember Jesus lives within all of us so I am not saying shut ourselves away, but somehow be open to finding Jesus in our daily work or chores, recognizing Jesus in each other. Jesus is peace; how much do most of us need to learn how to bring our minds to peace.

You see, Mary finds it good to sit at Jesus feet, she takes hold of the brief moments when Jesus can be hers and she his. As Jesus says, “Mary has chosen the better part”. In no way is Jesus against hospitality, as we saw with Abraham God delighted in the hospitality. It's when we start troubling in our minds about many things, then we lose sight of what is most important.

The lesson is not that we don't bother and so prepare a poor meal or be inhospitable; it's rather that we don't let the meal prevent us from listening to Jesus. As we read, Martha welcomed Jesus into her house, what she did was good, but then she got so distracted by her preparations that she neglected him! It's all about balance. It can be very damaging to our Christian lives if we try to work for Christ without spending time with Christ. Jesus himself tells us "apart/without from me you can do nothing" (John 15.5).

As a Christian, we represent Christ to the world; to do this well and show others what it means, I suggest that we first need to spend time with him (as we are today), and learn from him. We must take time to be holy.

I said at the start that we have made the decision to spend at least this hour with God. I know we can get distracted but I wonder, if I came down and asked you what's the key point of what I hope we might remember today, or turn round and ask my friends here, how many of us have been listening with our ears and hearts to let God speak to us; how many of us maintain our listening spirit during the Mass, or are we going through our shopping list, planning where we are going later?

Sometimes we criticize others and pity ourselves because we feel overworked, and it's at these moments we can take time to examine our lives. Perhaps in all of our busyness, we have been ignoring the Lord. Martha's problem was not that she had too much work to do, but that she allowed her work to distract her and pull her apart. She was trying to serve two masters! If serving Christ makes us difficult to live with, then something is terribly wrong with our service! This is not easy but the key is to have the right priorities: Jesus Christ first, then others, then ourselves. It is vitally important that we spend time "at the feet of Jesus" every single day, letting Him share His Word with us.

One of the most important parts of the Christian life is the part that only God sees. If we don't meet with our Lord at some point every day, we will soon become like Martha, busy, but not blessed.

My prayer for myself and all of us, is that we will develop a habit of spending time with Jesus, who mysteriously is both our friend and our Lord; and then we will be more and more blessed.

Then if we consider today's psalm, we are reminded what qualities we should express to live in God's presence. Practice justice, speak the truth, don't slander, don't slur anyone, keep our promises... aren't these great principles we should strive for all the time? Qualities that indicate true friendship.

Rev Jonathan de Krester