

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Giving a sermon one Sunday, the pastor heard two teenage girls in the back giggling and disturbing people. He interrupted his sermon and announced sternly, "There are two of you here who have not heard a word I've said." That quieted them down. When the service was over, he went to greet people at the front door. Three adults apologized for going to sleep in church, promising it would never happen again.

Dear Friends,

Hospitality is one of the best things around the world. Hospitality is an opportunity to show love and care. No matter where you go, people are so nice to welcome you and willing to talk to you, which helps you to feel at home.

Today's readings help us to welcome God in our home. The first reading says that Abraham was sitting outside on a hot day. He looked up to find three strangers standing nearby on the path, apparently nourishing their curiosity about the tent and its occupants. It is not clear that Abraham knew who they were, but for our part we are told that they were God appearing to Abraham. We heard how Abraham reacted to those three men of God. It was also seen by the interpreters of the scripture as a great icon of the Holy Trinity. It was quite a welcoming, a beautiful display of hospitality to God in his home. At the end, there is a great promise that will be fulfilled in Isaac.

Healthy spirituality has always been a question of putting a number of things into a delicate balance, and then walking a tightrope, so as not to fall off either side. Today's gospel explains that a balance in our lives will help us grow closer to God. It is always a question when we read this gospel whether Martha or Mary is right? Which is important?

Spiritual health is very much the task of living the proper tension between a number of things: This tension is often depicted as the one that is described in the biblical passage of Martha and Mary. Martha engaged herself in the necessary task of serving others while Mary simply sat at Jesus' feet, doing nothing but loving him a lot. Jesus commends Mary, saying she has chosen the better part. Christian spirituality forever after has had to struggle with those words. Is prayer really more important than active service?

A healthy spirituality is not a question of choosing between Mary and Martha, but of choosing both—contemplation and action, soul-craft and statecraft, loving and doing, prayer and service, private morality and social justice.

In our community, we need both. We need someone to listen to. We have been talking about how we can attract young people into the church. One of the ways is to feed them, which means being hospitable to them and welcoming them.

There is a mechanical and mysterious life in each of us. In the church history over the centuries, both spirituality had its' value. Some saints and founders of the congregation chose to live a mystic life.

One thing is necessary, which Jesus mentions in the Gospel: Relation to God. Real hospitality means a two-way relationship in which host and guest both open to each other and become present to one another in various ways. That is how we are supposed to act every day.

We are to find God in all things, in all the people we know and/or help, and no matter how busy we might be, to relate to them because God is within them, deep in their souls. Touch them. Hear them. Prepare meals for their presence without forgetting about them. We will be giving hospitality to God himself.

It is always a two-way relationship. God is ready to relate with us every time. How do we relate with him? I know it is hard for us to turn off our smart phones for an hour. We are busy year-round doing many things. How much time have we given to welcome God in our midst? Abraham and Mary gave it. Martha forgot like you and I do, but she learned. Let's learn it, too.

We remember our patroness saint St. Mary Magdalene this week. She was a model of a missionary discipleship. She longed for Jesus. Jesus showed himself to her. She was courageous, trustful as well as devoted to Christ.