

GOSPEL REFLECTION: *an excerpt from "Why Jesus Loved Martha (and Why We Should, Too)"*¹

by Anne Maloney

When Martha complains about Mary, Jesus tells her that Mary has “chosen the better part” by sitting at his feet and listening to every word he says. A part of me has always wanted to point out to Jesus that the lovely meal he had no doubt just consumed didn’t get created by woodland creatures, that if Martha had, in fact, made the same choice as Mary, Jesus and his pals would be pretty darned hungry and thirsty. But perhaps not. Perhaps if both sisters had sat at his feet, everyone would still have eaten, but the meal might have been less elaborate, more like Bethany’s version of a deli lunch. And that would have been fine. Maybe everyone would have had to get themselves a drink, but they were adults. They could handle it.

It may well be, though, that Martha didn’t *want* to serve Jesus the Bethany version of a deli lunch. Maybe she *wanted* the pleasure of serving a nice meal to her dear friend. If so, Jesus might have been saying, then do it and stop complaining. This moment might resonate with many of us; it certainly feels familiar to me. I have more than a few memories of times in my own life when I insisted on making a delicious meal or performing some “above and beyond” task for my family. I usually start out feeling quite virtuous about my selflessness, build to a slow simmer of resentment about my family’s lack of appreciation for my wonderfulness; eventually I explode at everyone for not fully appreciating the meal or service that they had not even asked for, that I had insisted on preparing for or doing for them. One of my son’s favorite stories revolves around one such event; I had made the seamless transition from “I love serving my family” to “why do I have to do all the work” to “why don’t they appreciate me” to “I resent their lack of appreciation” to full-bore explosion and tears; on this particular occasion, I hollered at my confused family that I “had been a SAINT for FORTY-FIVE MINUTES.” Even I heard the absurdity of that plaint, and the tension disappeared as I dissolved into laughter at my own nutty self. I surely have more than a little bit of Martha in me. I don’t think I am alone in that regard.

¹ Maloney, Anne. “Why Jesus Loved Martha (and Why We Should, Too).” *Crisis Magazine*. 26 July 2016. <<https://www.crisismagazine.com/2016/jesus-loved-martha>>

Still. Are we letting Mary off the hook too easily? While Martha slaves away in the kitchen, Mary is doing nothing, just hanging out with her friend Jesus. And yet. No doubt many of us can think of times when we would much rather have bustled about, doing chores, running errands, when what was really needed was simply our presence. When my children were small, I sometimes found it much easier to make their beds and cook their dinner than to actually pay attention to them—to listen to the story one of them was trying to tell me, or to play Candyland, or to just be with them. When friends and family members have been in pain or in grief, how many of us would rather send flowers, or try to fix them, when all they really need is someone to sit with them in the pain? It is really not at all clear, once I think about it, that Mary is doing the easier thing. To be still, to listen, to sit with our loved ones is very often not easy at all. I have a friend who, now and then, will say to me (when I need it, which is all too often) “Anne. Don’t just do something. Sit there.”

LECTIO DIVINA QUESTIONS²

1. What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you from the readings or reflection?
2. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates?
3. What is Christ’s personal invitation to you from the Scripture?

² From Soul Shepherding < <https://www.soulshepherding.org/lectio-divina-groups/> >