16th Sunday C

**The right kind of hospitality is today’s message.**

Abraham and Sarah are models of hospitality. He sees the 3 strangers on their journey and invites them and prepares them a sumptuous meal. In return the visitors, the angel of God, grant them a son.

Martha and Mary in the gospel had their own ideas about Hospitality. Martha went directly to the kitchen and hurriedly prepared food for her special guests. She was frantic and nervous because she was doing everything by herself and was running out of time. On the other hand, Mary was not concerned about the work in the kitchen. She sat down at the feet of Jesus and listened to his every word.

Martha represents the active Christian, while Mary the contemplative Christian. Which of the two was favored by Jesus? When Martha barged in to complain that her sister was not helping her, Jesus gently reprimanded her: “Martha, Martha, you are so worried and anxious about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.”

Does this mean Jesus regarded contemplative life as more important than the active life? **Definitely not**. Both are important in the life of every Christian. However, Jesus made sure that we set our priorities right: first things first. When asked about what the greatest commandment is, Jesus made it very clear: “Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. This is the first. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” God first, neighbors next.

Mary has chosen the better part, not that Martha chose the wrong one. Rather, Mary had the right priority. She sat down and listened to the words of the Lord. Before doing anything, she made sure she had the guidance and inspiration of the Lord. On the other hand, Martha was “anxious and worried about many things” because she rushed right into her work without seeking the wisdom and strength from the Lord.

Work and prayer are both important. It is more a question of which of the two should come first. The Gospel is telling us that it is prayer that should come first so that our work will have the guidance and inspiration from God. **A quotation says, “When man works, it is only man who works. But when man prays, God works.”**

There is a story about two woodcutters. The first woodcutter works eight hours a day. The second works only for five hours. But both of them have equal number of logs cut with their axe. Asked about the secret of his productivity, the second woodcutter said, “It is because I take time to rest and recharge my body. And while resting, I sharpen my axe.”

Nowadays, people have to be reminded of resting. Too many among us have the disease called STD - stress, tension and depression. We work so hard to make ends meet. We rush to meet deadlines, to catch the flight, and to come on time for our appointments. At the end of the day, we are exhausted, wasted, dull and empty. Every year we make it a point to take vacation. It has become too expensive, and we cannot even think of taking some time off from work. **Worst of all, many of us say that we have no time even to go to Church or to pray. We are just too busy.** The Lord is now telling us: “Martha, Martha, you are so worried and anxious about so many things! Relax. Come to me, and I will give you rest!” We need to come to Jesus to get some rest and lots of sharpening.

Remember: Jesus is the tree; we are the branches. A branch cannot bear fruit if it is not connected to the tree. We are powerless and lifeless if we are not connected to Jesus. We have lots of work to do and many obligations to fulfill. Yes, we have to work hard. But first, let us make sure we find time to sit down at the feet of Jesus and listen to his words, be inspired by His spirit and be strengthened by His grace. Then the work becomes light, the fruits of our labors become sweet and abundant. Let us take home the motto of Saint Benedict: “Ora et labora.” Pray and work. Not vice versa.