

Sixteenth Sunday in ordinary Time C - There is Need of Only One Thing

July 20, 2025

Stephen Covey, a well-known American management guru, once did a demonstration during a business class by putting rocks of various sizes into a 1 gallon mason jar, then gravel to fill the gaps, then sand, finally filled the jar with water to the top. Rock is the most important, then gravel, then sand. The order in which the different sizes of rocks and sand are placed in the jar is very important. If we put gravel and sand first, it is impossible for the big rocks to be put into the jar. Isn't this a vivid portrayal of our life as Christians? If we fail to put first in our life "the better part", or life's "one necessary thing", all the spaces in our life will be taken up with minor or frivolous "many things", we won't be able to complete the most important things in our life. Are you busy? Do you find yourself feeling overwhelmed by all the tasks you have to do most of the time? Have you ever tried to prioritize and check what is the most important and necessary thing you should do first?

Our lesson from the Gospel of Luke (Luke 10, 38-42) today has something to say to us about our busyness. In fact, it seems like a text written specifically for our time and culture. In the story, we have the quintessential busy person: Martha, who has "many tasks." She is very much like most of us. In fact, she has so many tasks, she is described as being "distracted by them." How many of us can relate to being so busy that we're distracted? Add to this fact, we often spend our downtime on social media. Truly, the level of distraction we may be managing is likely incalculable. Perhaps we are so busy and distracted that the only thing we notice is that we're not getting the help or support we need. That was certainly true of Martha. Like Martha, we often occupy ourselves with too many "things" which result in distractions, preventing us from recognizing the presence of our Lord Jesus. Or, perhaps, we may use our busy-ness as an excuse to avoid conversing with Christ, building a relationship, and becoming His confidante. In doing so, we have forfeited the opportunity to be empowered by Christ, and are left to battle life's challenges by our own power. That's what worried Jesus.

There is no doubt that Jesus loves both Martha and Mary. However, it is Mary who really understands Jesus, making her more receptive to Jesus' messages. Therefore, this also makes it easier for Jesus to communicate with her. A strong relationship is built on the foundation of mutual understanding; and communication is key to promote mutual understanding. If we want to become Jesus' confidante, we must follow Mary's footsteps and learn from her. By Mary's example, we, too, may establish an intimate relationship with God. To become Jesus' confidante, we do not begin by offering our services and work; instead, we must begin by keeping Him company, listening to Him and "staying" with Him. That means, we begin by encountering Him. Are we willing to become Jesus' confidante? The most important thing is not to be numbed by work; we must ask Jesus to inflame our desire to encounter him in our daily life, accompany him, listen to him, and stay with him. Yes, Mary took the initiative to learn from Jesus, ignoring the role as a woman expected by her culture, and ignoring the societal demand to keep busy. We too can be counter cultural like Mary, ignoring what the world expects of us by putting Jesus as our top priority.

Jesus sounds a little like a Zen Buddhist teacher with that phrase, "There is need of only one thing." The practice of being present to the here and now, of having a mindfulness that is not distracted or busied or hurried, but focused on only one thing is a teaching we find throughout Eastern religions and in all forms of meditation, including the practice of Christian contemplation and Centering Prayer. Because it is so effective, this practice has made its way into current psychology and therapeutic practice. But Jesus was teaching this way of being 2,000 years ago. And truly, we need to re-learn how to stop our busyness and distraction and to be present like Mary, as Jesus advises. Indeed, *there is need of only one thing*, one most important purpose of life, that is, to walk the path of holiness, as well as accompany and lead more people to know and love God through evangelization and charitable works. Many people spend excessive time on work, they tend to neglect spending time on relationships with others, making these relationships vulnerable. The devil goes after our closest relationships because that will affect and hurt us the most. The most obvious relationships are the one between God and ourselves as well as relationships in a marriage and family. "Pride" also pulls us away from God, telling us to only trust ourselves and rely on our own strength instead of relying on God and trusting others. Our enemies build upon our "pride" by adding "many things": distractions, preferences, attachments, and addictions,

until there's no more room for God. We willingly become slaves of "speed" and "efficiency". To fight our "enemies", we must be like Mary to sit still at the feet of our teacher, Jesus. We too are called to stop, to put aside our many tasks and all that distracts us. As Christians, we are called to do this every day, and if we can't manage that, we can start by doing it periodically and work our way up. We can pray to God, read the Scriptures or devotional books regularly, and be present to God and God's presence in Christ to us, and listen for the still small voice of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. It is there and God is always reaching out to us in love.

At St. Joan of Arc's trial, she was questioned as to whether the voice of God she claimed to hear wasn't merely a voice in her head. She responded by saying, "How else do you think God speaks to us?" Indeed, we are called to expect to hear God's voice as we pray and read Scripture, attend church, and listen to the wise friends and counsellors in our lives. All followers of Jesus are called to observe a Sabbath day, a day of rest, every week – and to stop and sit at Jesus' feet. Sabbath goes beyond the necessity of vacation periods and is an invitation into regular times of spiritual retreat. We can also pursue other options of stopping to listen: seeing a spiritual director, keeping a journal, reading daily, worshipping weekly, and creating time for family and private devotion to God. Every home can set aside one place for prayer, and we can all create a prayer corner or altar in our homes. Our kitchen or dining room tables can also become places to read Scripture, share, and pray.

According to Ignatian spirituality, our active life feeds our contemplative life and our contemplative life informs our active life. In the example of Martha and Mary welcoming Jesus, the focus is not what they do to attend to Jesus but how they do it, their attitude, and their motivations. Many biblical scholars agreed that even if Martha had chosen to sit by Jesus' feet and listen to Him, her mind would still be preoccupied with the "many things"; thus unable to accept what Jesus has to tell her. Contrarily, if Mary chose to serve Jesus by preparing food for him while maintaining her attitude and mentality of listening to God, she would still be able to have a genuine encounter with Jesus through her active work and service. The core is that we need to know what is the "only necessary thing" in life, that is, "to listen to Jesus and do whatever He tells you". We should not let the "many things" disturb and "distract" us into a state of "chaos", thus losing "Order" and "Focus". When we allow God to enter into our life, we will not have trouble recognizing His voice, and by listening to Him, we can discern His will. The main goal is to think of Jesus always and follow his example. May his words soak into our soul so that our families can heed his call to stop, slow down, be present, and sit at his feet, because **"there is need of only one thing."** Thanks be to God.