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Center for Spiritual Development

Daily Reflections

Image by Christine Sponchia

WHAT IS THE BETTER PART?

By Sr. Katherine (Kit) Gray, CSJ

Introduction

Today's reading from Luke's Gospel is in between the parable of the Good Samaritan and Jesus teaching his disciples to pray. In the Good Samaritan parable, we see "love your neighbor" in concrete action and after the story of Mary and Martha, we hear from Jesus about how to pray.

In today's reading, Jesus is in the home of Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus. Because from John's Gospel, we know that Jesus "loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (Jn 11:5), I suggest we hear the dialogue in today's passage the context of that intimate relationship.

Today's Gospel

*Jesus entered a village
where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him.
She had a sister named Mary*

*who sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak.
Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said,
"Lord, do you not care
that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving?
Tell her to help me."
The Lord said to her in reply,
"Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things.
There is need of only one thing.
Mary has chosen the better part
and it will not be taken from her."*

LUKE 10:38-42



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Reflection

This passage has sometimes been used to exalt prayer/reflection over action in the Christian life, and as “hearers of the Word,” we may be tempted to identify with one sister or the other--Mary or Martha. A more helpful reading of this passage is to see them as two aspects of the human person. Martha is the one who welcomes Jesus and provides hospitality--an important virtue at the time of Jesus--and so it can seem unfair that Jesus rebukes Martha and says that Mary has “chosen the better part.” It could be helpful to understand Jesus’

words as a challenge to Martha's being "anxious and worried about too many things." From this perspective, Mary exemplifies a focused attention to Jesus, which is "the better part" no matter what the setting or activity is.

(Acknowledging the insights of Mahri Leonard-Fleckman in *Ponder, Contemplative Bible Study, Year C*)

For Prayer

Mary and Martha, God's Will and Weight Lifting

*We are distracted, Lord
By our many things
Many thoughts
Many things done
And yet to do
And that we're not going to do
Speak us into being peace today
Speak us into being quiet today
Speak us into having a fallow heart*

MARY OLIVER

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