

Views from the Pews - Mary and Martha

Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' Luke 10:40-42.

It doesn't take much imagination to picture this oh-so-familiar scene. There sat Jesus surrounded by his disciples, including at least some of the seventy that had returned from the mission on which he had sent them 'ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go' (v.2.). So Martha's house (Luke makes that clear in the statement that 'Martha welcomed him into her home', v. 38) was probably crowded and noisy. Both Martha and Mary recognised Jesus as 'Lord', but responded differently.

Martha went into a tizz with preparing the very best hospitality she could offer to such an important guest. (Surely I am not the only one who makes an extra effort to clean up the place and cook a good dinner when a special visitor is expected to arrive – especially one whose opinion I value!). Martha was just the same.

Mary took the opposite view. Here was someone who was indeed very special, but she was less concerned about caring for his physical needs (and incidentally making a good impression on him) than about hearing his message. So she 'sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying'. (v. 39). She was probably quite well aware that she should be helping Martha with domestic tasks, but judged the chance to listen to Jesus well worth risking Martha's anger.

Martha's complaint to Jesus is understandable considering the cultural emphasis on hospitality in that time. But Jesus gently admonishes Martha, reminding her that Mary has chosen the value of spiritual sustenance over earthly duties.

In Martha's frustration, we may recognize our own tendencies to prioritize busyness over spiritual nourishment. Like Martha, we often find ourselves consumed by the demands of our daily lives, neglecting the essential need to take time to listen to Jesus. Conversely, Mary's choice to prioritize intimacy with Jesus demonstrates a profound understanding of true discipleship. Her posture of humility and receptivity serves as a poignant example for us, challenging us to cultivate a similar disposition in our own relationship with Christ. We must all aim to strike a balance between our responsibilities and our time spent at His feet.

Kim King