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16th Sunday in Ordinary Time - 17 July 2022

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17 July 2022

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Patricia Gemmell

Introduction

Hospitality is the theme that links the first reading and the gospel, but who is the host and who is the guest? In each reading extravagant human hospitality is overwhelmed by the graciousness of God. The psalm and second reading remind us of what our lives might look like if we seek to make our home in God. Ultimately, all the readings speak of our deep hunger for God's living Word.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you are the Word of God.
Lord, have mercy.

You teach us how to listen.
Christ, have mercy.

You draw us into the life of the Trinity.
Lord, have mercy.

Collect

The oration

Show favour, O Lord, to your servants
and mercifully increase the gifts of your grace,
that, made fervent in hope, faith and charity,
they may be ever watchful in keeping your commands.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

This is the second collect introduced into the Ordinary Time Masses from the liturgy of ancient Milan. Its original liturgical setting was as an oration during the days of

fasting, vigil and petition in preparation for the feast of Pentecost in Milan. The prayer was well crafted for such an occasion, with its references to the fervour of the community's faith, hope and love, its vigilance and perseverance, and the observance of the divine commands such as fasting, prayer and petition. This immediacy and specificity are now obscured with the prayer nestled into Ordinary Time. This leaves the 'commands' as open to broader interpretation and somewhat less touching on our actual lives. Nevertheless, the strength and persistence which enable vigilant observance of divine mandates is a product of the faithful's passion for the virtues of faith, hope and love. Both this fervour and perseverance are gifts of God's forgiveness and clemency. (Gerard Moore)

First Reading

Genesis 18:1-10

Abraham is visited by three angels, but who is this visitation really for?

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 14:2-5. R.v.1

The just will live in the presence of the Lord.

We are challenged to see that our relationship with God demands right relationship with others.

Second Reading

Colossians 1:24-28

In this reading, perhaps written by Paul from prison in Rome, or written by one of his followers shortly after his death, the writer exhorts us not to lose faith.

Gospel Reading

Luke 10:38-42

In today's gospel we hear the familiar and much-loved story of Martha and Mary.

Reflection

Early Church fathers saw the story in the first reading as a foreshadowing of the doctrine of the Trinity, and indeed the narrator shifts disconcertingly from singular to plural.

The Lord appeared to Abraham...he saw three men standing near...he ran to meet them... "my Lord," he said... "you shall refresh yourselves," ... they ate... "Where is your wife Sarah?" he asked him... Then his guest said...

Later we learn that one of the three men is indeed the LORD God, and the two others are angels. Andrei Rublev's now famous icon of the Trinity is based on this story – the three men with angel wings sit in a circle around the table, with Abraham's house, the oak of Mamre and a mountain in the background. In the centre of the table is the dish representing Abraham's banquet.

In the hottest part of the day Abraham's welcome and hospitality are well and truly extravagant– he *runs* to meet the strangers, offers them a little bread for refreshment but then *hastens* to Sarah (no doubt resting in the tent), tells her to *hurry* and knead three bushels of flour (a huge amount), then *runs* to the cattle to choose a calf himself, orders his servant to cook it, and serves it up with cream and milk. There is a real sense of urgency in his desire to please and detain his guests. You have to suspect that somehow Abraham recognised early on that these men were no ordinary strangers. Indeed, his request, "My Lord, I beg you, if I have found favour with you, kindly do not pass your servant by," makes good sense if understood as his plea to God to spend some time with him. It is a humble utterance that belies a deep desire for intimacy with God.

Ironically, this visitation is not for Abraham. It is for Sarah. Although she remains hidden in the tent throughout this episode, it is she whom God enquires after, and it is to her that a son is promised. God sometimes calls when we least expect it, even in places of obscurity, surprising us with overwhelming generosity. Sarah will be the mother of Israel. This is a God who goes beyond all that we could ever dream of or ask for.

Mountains are places of human and divine encounter, so dwelling on God's holy mountain means to live in the presence of the Lord. In psalm 26, the psalmist sings, "There is one thing I ask of the Lord, for this I long, to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." We know this as our longing too and today's psalm tells us exactly who it is who will achieve this – those who are just. The psalmist sets out a detailed job description. It is an array of moral and ethical precepts that challenge us to examine our consciences and strive to do better. Relationship with God depends entirely on our relationships with others.

In the letter to the Colossians, the suffering Paul refers to is that of being in prison, though he may also be well aware that he is soon to die. It is a reminder that suffering is part of the Christian life, but Paul is also expressing his love for the people to whom he is writing. Because he loves them, he is happy to suffer and even to die for having brought God's message to them. In seeking to strengthen the faith of the Colossians, Paul evokes the image of the church as the body of Christ – they belong to a communion of believers in a great mystery, the mystery of "Christ among you, your hope of glory."

There is a power in Paul's conviction that is hard to resist. He has suffered so much so that they might believe. They have been given so much training and instruction in wisdom. The message is one of hope and glory. How could they possibly give up their faith?

In my lifetime, preaching on today's gospel about Martha and Mary has shifted from the predictable homily on the superiority of the contemplative life to much more nuanced explorations of the text. This is due in part to the emergence of feminist theology but also to the much wider explosion of biblical scholarship since Vatican II.

Many are the women who have instinctively sided with Martha in this story and thought she was right to complain about having to do all the work. No doubt this was the reflection of an era when the woman of the house usually did all the housework. Jesus certainly did rebuke Martha but calling her twice by name suggests he did so gently.

Martha is clearly the head of the household and takes her responsibilities very seriously. Mary chooses to do otherwise and sits at the Lord's feet to listen to him. Although service and especially service of the Lord are highly valued in the Christian disciple, there are a few problems here for Martha: we are told she is distracted with all the serving, and she worries and frets about so many things. Not so good. She has failed to see that only one thing is needed. What is that one thing? It's not crystal clear. In listening to this gospel, it may be up to you to discern in the context of your own life.

Mary got it right – whatever it was. What might it be in the context of this particular story? Being your own person and making your own decisions? Listening to Jesus? Being receptive to the word of God? Learning what it takes to be a disciple? Living in the presence of the Lord? Showing true hospitality? Seeing to the real needs of another? Loving attention? All of the above, maybe?

In Luke's gospel, this story comes right after the parable of the Good Samaritan. Does that parable cast some light on Martha and Mary? Is Martha like the priest and Levite, too busy with her duties to attend to Jesus, who at this point knows he is on a journey to meet his death in Jerusalem? Is Mary like the Good Samaritan, the one who truly sees Jesus in his need for more than just refreshment?

We carry within us aspects of both Martha *and* Mary. In this technological age we are all distracted, at least some of the time. We have many good reasons to worry and fret. However, if we let our lives be dominated by distractions and worries, we may fail to be attentive to the one thing necessary. Sometimes Jesus just wants us to sit with him in silence and contemplation. His own life is an example of how the active life was balanced by times of quiet prayer alone with God.

Jesus' disciples are men and women of action. Love demands action and our world desperately needs us now to be active in love. In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis calls us to both a contemplative *and* prophetic lifestyle. We must learn to be both Mary *and* Martha, choosing at times silent, listening and receptive prayer, not as an escape from action, but as the very foundation for it. We could well ask ourselves, would Abraham have recognised his guests if he had not been resting in the heat of the day?

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

In the reading from the letter to the Colossians we are called to keep faith. Therefore, in faith let us bring our needs to God.

Petitions

We pray for the leaders of our Church, especially Pope Francis, as well as our clergy, lay and religious leaders. May they continue to work through the process of the Plenary Council with faith and love.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for global leaders that they will actively seek to bring peace to their own countries and work for peace in the world.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who suffer from sexual exploitation through trafficking, domestic violence or other forms of abuse. May we all reach out with compassion to do what we can to help alleviate their suffering.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for ourselves that we may be open to the Spirit and listen as we are called to be Christ-centred and missionary in everything we do. May our communities increase in missionary outreach to those of other faiths and those of no faith.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray that the created world gifted to us by God will be respected and protected from environmental damage. May we all actively assist each other in better ways of living in the natural world.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those from our community who have died and those who mourn them. May their mourning be eased by the love and compassion of those around them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

Faithful God, knowing you answer our prayer, we offer these needs through the power of the Spirit and in the name of Jesus, the Lord.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	AOVNG	GA	CWB	CWBII	S&S1	S&S2
All people that on earth do dwell	25				533	613	448		
All the earth proclaim the Lord	184				534	611	447		
As gentle as silence					470	621	580		
As we gather at your table							451		
Blessed Jesus, at your word					531	626	457		
Gather us together	111								
I come with joy, a child of God							508		
I heard of the voice of Jesus say					468		512		
In faith and hope and love					442	722	520		
Lord of creation, to you be all praise					423	739	543		
The church of Christ, in every age						818	613		
The servant song		169			487		461		
We are called to serve								139	
We live and love your word			118				571		
We will serve the Lord								145	
Whatever you do						860			
When we listen			132						

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 14: *The just will live in the presence of the Lord.*

	CWB	GA	JOBC	JOBF	LPC	PM
Psalm 14	396		pg. 81		pg. 122	



**A WOMAN NAMED MARTHA
WELCOMED JESUS.**

Lk 10:38