

Homily: 16th Sunday: Cycle C: 2016: Gen 18: 1-10a; Ps 15; Col 1:24-28; Lk 10: 38-42

“The Soul of the Apostolate”

You and I live in a workaholic/over-active age! It’s all about activity, doing, filling up our time, run, run run and the consequent anxiety and worry that flows from that mentality which consumes us, and begins often when we are very young - see when kid’s activities take precedence over coming to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, or teenagers working on the weekends (and not really trying to get better hours of work), and then Mass is regularly skipped, and a lot of people don’t even confess it as they are desensitized to this serious sin over time! In contrast, it is very hard for most of us to be quiet, to enjoy the silence, to recognize that who we are is essential, while what we do in life is secondary; and to put everything into God’s Providential care - that **we are called to work to live, not live to work**. And how does this over-emphasis on activity and work impact our spiritual lives? Well we need to look today at **what Jesus means** when he says to Martha, and by extension to many of us workaholics or over-active people, *“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.”*

1. **Martha was not a bad person.** In fact she was a very good person, and this is the same Martha we will honor on July 29th each year in the Liturgical calendar as St. Martha. But at this moment when Jesus addresses her in the Gospel she is not yet a saint. She **has one big obvious area of her life that needs readjusted**; namely, she has put **work** (any activity in a broad sense) ahead of her relationship with God. That is what **differentiates her from her sister Mary**, who has put the Lord first in her life. **To become a saint, which we are all called to become by our Baptism, God has to be first priority, no matter what else is pressing in our lives.**
2. **Please don’t misinterpret what Jesus is saying today. The Lord is not saying** that we don’t have to work to care for our family and others, that we don’t have to take care of our children and help form them through wholesome activities socially, emotionally, and spiritually, and to take care of the tasks of hospitality

when we have a guest over, or to work to learn responsibility as a young person, **but He is saying** they need to be in their proper order; namely, they all must flow from our deep union with Him in prayer or they will just be busy work that causes us to get stressed out and full of anxiety and to lash out at the very people we claim to be serving and helping. How sad is that reality when it happens!!! **How human (in a fallen sense) and how we all can relate to Martha's frustration in lashing out at Jesus saying, "Lord do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me!"** **What is the solution?** To sit at the feet of Jesus before we do our work and activities, like Mary in the Gospel, and listen to Him speak to our hearts, i.e., **to make our interior union with Jesus the first priority of our lives.** Prayer must be first; and not just a few quick prayers a day but an abiding spirit of prayer throughout the day. **This is the secret of the saints:** living in a prayerful spirit of Faith in good times and bad, moment to moment, then this becomes the source of the energy for them to accomplish so much "work" for God's kingdom, see Blessed Mother Teresa and her daily two hours of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament; sitting at the feet of the Lord. What a holy irony; the people who put God truly first are the ones who do the most work for the Kingdom.

3. What a hard spiritual reality for us moderns to grasp, since we are so influenced by our culture which tells us we have to be constantly busy with worldly or even spiritual activities. This was brought home to me once when I heard it said by a priest that another priest "*prays too much.*" HA-HA. Really?! What a nice "problem" to work on! I don't think that is a problem for most of us and I include myself in that: **WE DON'T PRAY ENOUGH!!!** I know that priest in question and I don't think he prays too much, but I think that comment is a reflection of the "bias of Martha," as I call it, that we should be doing things, even for God and the Church, all the time, and that prayer while important is not as important as activity. Pope Pius XII called that the "**heresy of activism**" back in the 1950's; and it has only gotten worst in the subsequent 60 years. Why is that the case? Because a disciplined life of prayer can be hard, especially as you grow and God

purifies you more and more spiritually. It is so much easier to DO things for God and other people, and additionally we sometimes see the results more when we do things, and we love seeing results as human beings. Waiting at the feet of the Lord is more hidden and He calls us there to share in the Cross in an intimate way for souls, to learn from Jesus as St. Paul says today in his letter to the Colossians *“to rejoice in our sufferings for the sake of the Church, to fill up in our flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His body, which is the Church...”* There is nothing objectively lacking in the sufferings of Christ for our salvation; what is lacking is that we as members of His body the Church have not yet fully embraced the Cross as He has, and so we need to be transformed by Him in love, in purification, and this only happens over time if we sit at his feet like Mary; and then and only then, will our activities in imitation of Martha bear spiritual fruit for the glory of God and the good of souls, our own and others. **Take hope: both Mary and Martha are now saints!!!** The same can happen for us modern workaholics; but only if we make a decision today to make our life of prayer first priority. God bless you.

Recommended reading:

The Spiritual Doctrine of Father Louis Lallemant, S.J. Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland, 1946. (Out of print but used copies can sometimes be found at www.loomebooks.com ; this is a book primarily written for religious, but lay people can benefit also from many of his insights on the spiritual life).

The Soul of the Apostolate. by Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard. TAN books. (The classic work on the proper integration of prayer and activity in the Christian life).

Deep Conversion, Deep Prayer. by Fr. Thomas Dubay, Ignatius Press.

And then two other essential works on the spiritual life:

The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., ICS press, 1991.

The Three Ages of the Interior Life. by Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. Two volumes. TAN books. (For those of you who are intimidated by the 2 vols; a good introduction to this work is the little book: **The 3 Conversions in the Spiritual Life** also by Fr. Reginald Garrigou- Lagrange, TAN books, and then move on to the actual 3 Ages two volume work - which is a “the summa of the spiritual life”).