

Homily July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
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You might have noticed that we use the word “Beloved” more often in our prayers together. It is a way of experiencing Christ that is of the heart and of reciprocal intention. I am beloved by God and God is beloved by me. We are Beloved by God and God seeks our Belovedness.

Today’s gospel revolves around three main characters, all of them Beloved. While the passage talks about only 3 people, we understand from the context of Jesus’ time that there were multiple men and women present, and most likely children, maybe running around and being shushed. And within that same context the women and men had clearly defined roles, cultural norms that work to keep this oppressed people together and give them hope. These are important cultural norms.

This story from the very first breaks with those norms when, with Jesus knocking, it is Martha who opens the door. At that time, a woman never would never open the door. Martha is the beginning of this message, opening the door to Jesus, and the end of this message, the last to be spoken to by Jesus. It seems the lesson is for Martha and us, with Mary as the vehicle.

We see Mary as the vehicle, “immediately” sitting at the feet of the Rabbi; Mary is physically very close to Jesus. This is unheard of at the time of Jesus. Contrary to the cultural norms, Mary is with the men when she belongs with the women in the kitchen, or certainly another room. Not only is she with the men, but Mary is learning the same lessons as the men from the Rabbi.

How does she manage to get such an honorary seat...Is it... hearing the magnetic voice of Jesus? Her unyielding desire to be filled with the gifts his presence confirms? Her rejection of being blocked by the men who might be ignoring her? Her elbowing her way through them to a place surely one of them feels he deserves, and has a right too? She ignored their glares, and staring, and their gossip.

Mary makes a choice here that is consistent with her heart-felt experience and intellectual acuity. In understanding Jesus’ message, Mary knows that women and men, indeed all people, are loved by God. Jesus does not make a hierarchical distinction... think of the workers in the field parable, the widow’s mite, or the healing of the bleeding woman, and more. God has no slaves or servants, only Beloveds.

By sitting with Jesus, Mary also upsets the other women, and more importantly her sister, Martha. Where is Martha while Mary is angling her way to be next to of Jesus?

Martha is caring directly for all the hospitality needs, her responsibility. Martha knows clearly what is expected of her, even though she opens the door and feels to her depth the look of love in Jesus' eyes that is beyond words. We can imagine that, as she answers the door and sees him, there is a movement, a shift within her. She is the first woman that day to feel his acceptance. Martha feels that draw of peace that Jesus exudes among his oppressed people, **but** she doesn't stay with her longing to remain with him; she is pulled away. Martha goes to her duties; her household obligations as the woman, as expected by her culture. It is a heavy responsibility for the hosting woman, and Martha is very successful at it. She has been well trained and Jesus always feels well received, loved, and safe in her house. How could she change that expectation now?

Martha is experiencing an existential tension. In a bold act, Martha complains to Jesus. Now she comes to Jesus and says: "Rabbi, don't you care, don't you care, that my sister has left me all alone to do the household tasks? Talk to her, that she might do her part in helping me!"

Mary is not following the rules, and Martha can't be still any longer. Her anxiety and tension is unresolved. She seeks a release of her anxiety. Jesus does not send her away! Jesus listens to Martha.

We can imagine that Martha wants to be at the feet of Jesus also, but she is constrained, her prescribed duties hold her back. Her ardent desire may be to be with Jesus...but then who would cook and serve?

Jesus, teaching and acting in an egalitarian way, wants Martha at his feet too, if that's what she wants. He feels compassion for her. He knows her and understands that she is often anxious. He softly says, "Martha, Martha! You're anxious and troubled about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her."

What if the better part is a freedom, a freedom that comes with authenticity that carries with it with the promise of an abundant life? Is Jesus offering Martha the choice that Mary made, or is Jesus offering Martha the choice to live her own life authentically?

If Martha shifts into our own honesty, she carries the fear of vulnerability, maybe the loss of some friends and family, or being thought less of. It's scary outside the cultural norms that some surely do not approve of, and others, though feeling a shift themselves, are unwilling to take the risk. Does Martha see this as a real option?

PAUSE

Looking at ourselves as the Mary of the Magdala community, we choose to be as authentic as possible. We do this in seen and unseen ways. We offer the Body of Christ, to all, as the Body of Christ gathered; living as a member of a sacred creation; held in the hands of God. We proclaim that all are children of God, equal in personhood and equal in value, and that a relationship with God in our own conscience is primary, and more. Basically we are doing what Mary did even if it is counterculture. As the Center for Action and Contemplation affirmed on Friday, "We might find ourselves swimming against the current, but we've made a conscious decision to practice something different in response to an inner call." PAUSE

Because Martha is as beloved to Jesus as Mary is, what is it that Martha has yet to choose? In this week's Center for Action and Contemplation writings is a definition of Belovedness by pastor, author, and peacemaker, Osheta Moore: "The whole of Jesus' ministry was to establish a community so convinced of their Belovedness to God that they proclaim the Belovedness of others. Belovedness is a massive act of owning and accepting your **humanness** as a gift from a God who **deeply** loves you."

Such is the relationship between Mary and Jesus. It is relationship that Christ wants with all of us. As Martha is faced with a choice in her time, so are we in our time. With the many existential threats we face today, how can we choose transformation and become the Beloved that Christ seeks?