

Today's gospel is a very interesting one which raises many questions. It portrays Martha as focussing on the work to be done whilst her sister Mary sits at the feet of Jesus listening to him. The former is the activist, the latter the contemplative.

This gospel has had a very interesting past. In the Middle ages it portrayed the value of the monastic life over life in "the world". It was considered by the Church to be more blessed to be in a monastery praying than in a village working and raising a family. It is interesting that Martin Luther, himself a monk, abolished monasteries and took a former nun as his wife.

He stressed that every person can honour God in their lives thereby teaching that both what we do in our lives and what we believe and contemplate have equal importance.

It is true for some women a life devoted to contemplation is right for them but for most women these days there should be few limits as to what they may choose. This holds good for both men and women. To impose a view that says that a woman should only work at home giving birth and rearing children and looking after the needs of the husband and their children is a view that is an antiquated one, thank goodness.

This view was certainly the dominant view several decades ago. To my mind a female may choose her own life's pathway and not have to succumb to the rules of the past imposed on them by males.

What else do we find in the gospel? First of all, we note that Martha welcomes Jesus into her home. Hospitality is pivotal here. In Luke, Jesus is described as being homeless and dependent on the hospitality of his disciples and also of strangers. He depended on the hospitality of people like Martha and Mary.

Whether they previously knew each other or not Jesus comes into Martha's home and she busies herself with providing appropriate food and drink. But she notices that her sister Mary just sits down on the floor at Jesus' feet and listens to what Jesus has to say.

This annoys Martha that Mary is not helping in the kitchen.

It is interesting that Martha never asks Mary to help her, instead she asks Jesus to intercede for her saying, **“Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself?** Tell her then to help me.” There is a lot of **me, me, me** in this passage! I suppose when acting as a host you should consider your own position but equally you should want your guest/s to enjoy the occasion so that it will be happy for all present.

The response of Jesus is interesting! **“Martha, Martha you are worried and distracted by many things”**. Jesus seems to call her to account for her distractedness, her worry and her lack of focus.

I suppose it brings to mind life in our time. It is easy to be distracted and to lose focus, so we take a pessimistic attitude. We only have to watch the news each night to wonder what the future holds for us and for our world with its worrying negativity and emphasis on crimes committed and horrifying stories of war and suffering on a scale impossible to imagine.

By combining the contemplative with the active I believe we come up with the right answer. We should occasionally take time out to consider where our lives are at and how incredibly fortunate we are, then put into action whatever we can to place ourselves in the shoes of the needy. By prayer and by thoughts actions will follow. By doing and by listening our response will be important! This is at the heart and soul of us as individuals and as a caring Parish.

On a personal level I hope you will bear with me as I use the examples of my wife and her brother.

Robyn: hard worker, excellent and caring wife, mother and grand-mother, a fabulous cook and keen to have friends around for meals.

She is outgoing with many interests away from life in the home, her garden and her family

of magpies. She is fine artist and keen sewer, knitter, crocheter and patch-worker to name a few of her skills as well as being a keen writer and reader and compiler of the weekly newsletter. Her life is rich and full. She works hard but also takes time out to relax and enjoy other pursuits. She is both a Martha and a Mary and is a deeply spiritual being. Her brother is a complete contrast who recently said that if he had to give up working he might as well be dead. A very gifted engineer who can make anything out of metal but his life has been a very small one.

It seems to me that we need to have both Mary and Martha in our lives but we should not neglect one and tie ourselves too much to the other. It might be time for all of us to reflect on the lives of both Martha and Mary and consider if this sums up where our lives are at and whether we need to change the focus of our lives a little.

Read Ecclesiastes.....

Ecclesiastes 3 King James Version

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die

A time to plant, and a time to harvest.

A time to break down, and a time to build up

A time to weep, and a time to laugh

A time to mourn, and a time to dance

A time to keep silence, and a time to speak

He hath made everything beautiful in his time also he hath set the world in their heart, that everyone should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.

Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that everyone should rejoice in their own works; for that is their portion.

