

The story in our gospel reading today could be labeled a biblical classic. It is the story about Mary and Martha, two sisters, and Jesus. It strikes home with us because it tells us so much about human nature, especially within families – especially between siblings. The story is really rather simple. Jesus and his disciples came to the village where his friends, Mary and Martha lived. They also had a brother named Lazarus, who, if you recall, died and, according to Christian tradition, Jesus restored to life. The bottom line is that this family was thoroughly devoted to Jesus, true friends even if they are not generally numbered with the disciples.

Now, at first glance, the dinner invitation, in today's story, was more than it appears, given Luke's account. Luke does not say so, but it is reasonable to assume that Jesus was not the only guest, invited at the exclusion of his closest disciples who were traveling with him. I think it is more than a good guess that we are talking about a fairly large dinner party that required a lot of work. As Luke tells the story, all available hands were needed in the kitchen and Mary stuck Martha with all the work. My heart goes out to Martha. Sure, she was whining when she complained that Mary had stuck her with all the work, but as Luke said, she had "many tasks." From this perspective, our Lord's response is odd. He might have moved the conversation to the kitchen, or what passed as a kitchen in the homes of that day. Jesus was also one not given to being stuck in cultural role models, so he might also have pitched in with some of the work himself. But none of this occurred. What did occur is a surprising chastisement! Jesus told Martha that she was wrong to complain and that Mary, by choosing to devote herself to listening to Jesus had chosen the better path. "Mary," Jesus said, "has chosen the better part, while you are distracted by many things and there is need of only one thing and I'm not going to take that from Mary."

What can we make of this? I think that Saint Luke's teaching point is evident and that Luke is going out of the way to make that point. Let me say in passing that this story occurs only in Luke, not the other gospels, and this in itself is unusual. Most of the remembered incidents in the life of Jesus are told pretty much the same in three if not all four of the gospels. Luke might have known something that the other sources did not, or he may have been being a bit creative, but he had a point to make. The point is this: we all live complex lives, lives filled with pressing demands, many of which are very important. These demands distract us, often severely. But there is a bottom line. The bottom line is that when all is said and done, the one thing that is lasting, for eternity, is our relationship with Jesus Christ. We need to keep this foremost in our minds. The one thing that really matters is our relationship with our Lord and Savior. If we give it the time that it deserves, and do not treat it incidentally as something to fit into our lives when and if we have the time, a prayer here, between tasks, a meditation there, between tasks, then we

will build and strengthen that relationship. Living life is prioritizing tasks and making choices. The wise person remembers what is truly important and that is putting Christ Jesus first. *Amen.*