

Friday (St. John of the Cross).

It must be remembered above all that if a soul is seeking after God, the Beloved is seeking it much more. The soul, therefore, considering that God is the chief doer in this matter, that it is He who guides it and leads it by the hand to where it cannot reach by itself, namely, unto supernatural things beyond the reach of the understanding, memory, and will, must take especial care to put no difficulties in the way of its guide.

Scripture (Matthew 6:32-33)

It is the pagans who set their hearts on all these material things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on God's saving justice, and all these other things will be given you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself.

16th Week of Ordinary Time

Don't just do something; sit there

When Abraham sees the three travellers, (Genesis 18:1-11), he is hospitable and invites them for a meal. Whilst they are eating, he stands attentively, ready to respond to any of their needs or requests. What Abraham doesn't yet know is that the person who promises that his wife Sarah will bear him a son is in fact God.

This visit from God has an interesting 'before and after'. When God spoke previously 'in person' and outlined his plans and Abraham's role in it, promising many descendants and the Covenant, (Gen 17.) Abraham 'bowed to the ground and laughed'; when the promise of an heir is made at the meal, Sarah overhears and laughs. Both think God's promise is impossible (ridiculous?) – they are old (99 and 90!), so a son is out of the question. Although Abraham couldn't see how God's promise could possibly come true, God was still able to work through and with him in his daily life, so long as he was hospitable, inviting God in and willing to serve, waiting for God to speak.

This is a key part of Jesus' visit to Martha and Mary. An initial reading of the meal, (Luke 10:38-42), rings alarm bells for me as it reminds me that I don't set aside enough time for prayer. Generally, I am more Martha in that I am generally so busy with 'life' that time for prayer is shortened or moved down the 'to do list'. I don't do much waiting! Luke is pointing us to more than setting aside time for prayer. He was heading to Jerusalem 'when he came to a village' reminding the reader of the mission of the 72 to go in pairs to villages that Jesus was to visit, (Luke 10). Martha and Mary had presumably welcomed the pair and been prepared for the coming of Jesus. Now that he has arrived, Martha busies herself with serving, as would be expected of her as a woman. She is being hospitable, making sure the guest is given all the comfort and respect he is due before she sits down, (if she would ever get to that).

In the eyes of any upright Jew, (including Martha), Mary's behaviour is shocking. So too is that of Jesus: he goes into a woman's house alone (no father or chaperone present); he allows himself to be served by a woman and, perhaps most controversially, he teaches a woman as a disciple. All of this is a sign of the new Covenant and the new relationships with God.

In her response to Jesus, then, Martha represents the current way of doing things. Jesus' gentle 'you worry and fret about so many things' compared to Mary's sitting and listening contrasts the many rules and rituals of the Pharisees' religion with the new, intimate relationship with God.

Mary will, of course, have to get up and resume daily life, but she will do so with a new understanding and a new perspective – and that won't be taken from her. We are not asked to choose 'Martha or Mary', but Mary then Martha. This meal, like with Abraham, is not simply a matter of making time for prayer, or putting aside time for Mass, (Eucharistic meal). When I do pray it is mostly me 'saying prayers', i.e. I do the talking and don't spend enough time listening to God, (I was 20 before I even realised that prayer should be a two-way process!). So few of us have ever been taught that prayer has to have a time of being passive, to sit at the feet of Jesus to wait and to listen. Having listened, we are sent out, but not with our agenda or with our mind-set, but able to say 'your will, not mine'.

It's the domestic version of what Jesus did in going first to the desert. Martin Bennett

Monday (Fr. Richard Rohr)

We need to waste time with the Lord. This is the foundation of our prayer lives. You're not being unproductive when you wait for God, when you listen for and wait for the Holy One. Our tradition gives us the Sabbath, a sense of sacred time in which to be, to listen, to be personal and not to "work at it." The Sabbath idea is that at least one-seventh of your life needs to be fallow, useless, empty and expectant – person to person.

Scripture (Luke 10:38-42)

A woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.' But the Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha,' he said, 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her.'

Tuesday (Cardinal Basil Hume)

I am speaking now to those whose daily energies are absorbed by family problems, their work, problematic living conditions and other difficulties. Set aside at least five minutes in the day in addition to morning and night prayers, just to be alone with God. Plan when and where to do this. It may have to be as you go to work; you may be able to find a quiet corner in the home; you may have to just go out and take a short walk on your own. You will recall how Our Lord slipped away from the crowds just to be alone. You must too.

Scripture (Psalm 84:1-5,10)

How lovely are your dwelling places, Lord. My whole being yearns and pines for his courts, my heart and body cry out for joy to the living God. How blessed are those who live in your house; they shall praise you continually. Blessed are those who find their strength in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. Better one day in your courts than a thousand at my own devices, to stand on the threshold of God's house than to live in the tents of the wicked.

Wednesday (St. Oscar Romero).

We really live outside of ourselves. There are very few humans who truly live inside themselves and that is why there are so many problems... In each person's heart, there is something like a small, intimate space, where God comes down to speak alone with that person. And this is where a person determines his or her own destiny, his or her own role in the world. If each of the people with so many problems were to enter at this moment this small space, and, once there, were to listen to the voice of the Lord which speaks in our conscience, how much could each one of us do to improve the environment, society, the family with whom we live?

Scripture (1 Kings 19:11-13)

Elijah was told, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord.' For at that moment the Lord was going by. A mighty hurricane split the mountains and shattered the rocks before God. But he was not in the hurricane. And after the hurricane, an earthquake. But he was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, fire. But he was not in the fire. After the fire, a light murmuring sound. And when Elijah heard this he covered his face with his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Thursday (Thomas Merton).

City churches are sometimes quiet and peaceful solitudes, caves of silence where we can seek refuge from the intolerable arrogance of the business world. Places where we can kneel in silence. Houses of God filled with his presence. There, even when we don't know how to pray, we can at least be still. Let there be a place, somewhere, where your mind can be idle, and forget its concerns, descend into silence and worship the Father. There should be a room, or some corner where no one will find you and disturb or notice you. Here you can loosen all the fine strings and strands of tension that bind you to the presence of others.

Scripture (Mark 6:42-47)

They all ate as much as they wanted. They collected twelve baskets of scraps of bread and pieces of fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand. And at once Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side near Bethsaida, while he himself sent the crowd away. After saying good bye to them, he went off into the hills to pray.