

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 20, 2025

This well-known Gospel passage is not primarily about choosing how you spend your time, whether in prayer or work or some other activity. Jesus is not pitting prayer against work. Sometimes this message has been used to argue that Jesus is promoting the contemplative life over a life of action. But then the Martha's in this room always object. They say, "If we just sat around praying all day, nothing would ever get done.' And okay, they have a point. And although prayer and contemplation are certainly essential to the Christian life, Jesus did indeed send His disciples out into the world to work, to work for the building of the kingdom of God, and Jesus Himself worked. So, prayer and work or action do not mean to be considered as enemies.

Maybe the question is not about how we spend our time exactly. Maybe '*choosing the better part*' is not necessarily choosing contemplation over action or choosing action over contemplation. Maybe that better part is available to us no matter whether we are working or praying or doing some other activity. And actually, I think we know this intuitively. If we're in the midst of a time of prayer, we know that we can choose to go along with moments of daydreaming or distraction, or we can choose the better part and bring ourselves back to focusing on the Lord. We know that if we're in the midst of a time of work or activity, we can choose to be present and mindful of God, which is the better part, or we can choose in some way to set it aside and say, 'God, I'm going to do this my own way.' Kind of like taking the Lord and putting Him on a shelf for a little bit. 'I love you, Lord, but right now I have to take care of this other thing. So, you just be over there. And if you would be quiet, I wouldn't mind.'

Jesus says in John 15, "Abide in me, and I in you." Abide in me, and I in you. *Choosing the better part* means that no matter what we're doing, whether praying or working or doing some other activity, we abide in Jesus. We remain in Him. We live from that place of the union with Him. It means we don't set Jesus aside in any way, but remain in Him, abide in Him, and be present to Him.

In the Gospel, Mary is fully present to Jesus. And I think the fact that she is not working in that moment is not really the point. It is not a critical part of this account. She is present. She is sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him. Her sister, Martha, is busy with the serving but apparently, while she is working, she's not focusing on serving out of love - love for Jesus and love for her sister. She seems to be focused on herself, and she is focused on the unfairness of having to do all the work herself without having any help from her sister.

How might the conversation have gone differently had Martha remained present to Jesus in her heart even while she was working? She was mindful that she was doing this work out of love. I suspect things may have gone differently. To abide in Jesus, to remain in Jesus, is to *choose the better part*. And it requires a lot of practice because we know, I think, the temptation, when we have other things to do is to set Jesus aside and we create this division between our spiritual life and the rest of life. But Jesus actually wants us to remain in Him no matter what we are doing. And there are many ways we can work on that. We can take up maybe different devotions that can be prayed while we're working or doing other things. We can have sacred music playing in the background or something while we're doing other things. We can just simply try to remind ourselves more and more frequently that the Lord is with us, the unseen guest in every conversation, or at every meal, in every place we go, that He is there, He is present. Even just remembering

that He is present helps us to be present to Him. And of course, this Sacraments are a tremendous gift in helping us to abide in Jesus to remain in Him. The sacrament of Reconciliation, Confession, helps us to return to Him perhaps after we have wandered a bit. After we recognize we haven't always been abiding in Him. Of course, the gift of the Holy Eucharist is Jesus' gift of abiding with us in which He invites us also to abide in Him in a special way. Even spending time with Him in Adoration, whether the host is exposed on the altar or reposed in the Tabernacle or receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, there is that beautiful intimate invitation: *"Abide in me, and I abide in you."*

It is good to reflect on how in the living of our mission of life, we abide in the Lord. For where are those places in life where we tend towards setting Jesus aside? Have we created somehow a dichotomy in our mind or in our living between spiritual life and the rest of life? Can we bring those together and abiding in Jesus, choose the better part.