

**Gen 18:1-10; Ps 14; Col 1:24-28; Luke 10:38-42**

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Abraham is sitting in his tent as the day is approaching its hottest, and he sees three men, who appear to be of some importance, passing by. Abraham addresses them as 'my lords' or 'my Lord' as a sign of his respect. The shifts between the singular and the plural when speaking about the visitors is a little ambiguous. *'He ran from the tent door to meet them (plural) and bowed himself to the earth and said, "O Lord, (singular) if I have found favour in your sight do not pass by your servant"'*. Perhaps one of the visitors stands out as being in charge. The next source of opacity is the use of the word "Lord". You cannot hear it, you can only read it. When Abraham says, *'O Lord, if I have found favour in your sight, do not pass by your servant.'* he is talking to one of the visitors.<sup>1</sup> When we read the word 'LORD', in capitals, it is God who speaks,<sup>2</sup> so we have *'The Lord (meaning God) appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre'*<sup>3</sup> We are presented with this interesting and overlapping interplay between, Abraham and the visitors and God where the delineation between God and the visitors - whether angels or men - is not clear. *'The LORD appeared to Abraham... He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him.'*<sup>4</sup>

Abraham rises from his resting place to greet them and asks them to stay for food. He humbly offers them a 'little water' and a

'little bread'. What he and his wife hurriedly prepare for them is a feast. There is no sense that this is excessive. His visitors accept it as their due.

As the visitors prepare to leave, God promises Abraham something wonderful: Sarah will have a child. Leaving aside that remarkable aspect, we recognise this for what it is, a blessing. A blessing is given by a superior to an inferior, by a lord to his servant, by God to his creature. The closing of the Gospel scene acts not only as preparation for the birth of Isaac but affirms that Abraham is entering into a Covenantal relationship with God. In his generous encounter with the visitors Abraham has made the right response, and God is pleased.

In the Gospel we find Martha *'distracted with serving'*. She is not doing the wrong thing; she is being hospitable. She is taking care of the guest who is under her roof, Jesus, who is worthy to be served, just as Abraham served his visitors. Maybe Martha is preparing a feast as well, with all her bustling about, and that is why she wants Mary to help her. *'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself?'* Jesus replies with that two-fold repetition of her name. This call of 'Martha, Martha' recollects her from her preoccupation with doing the 'right thing'.

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<sup>1</sup> Gen 18:3

<sup>2</sup> This is the 'Adonai', the word used to replace the Holy Name of God which is only uttered on the Day of Atonement: YHWH or Jehovah. 'I am who I am.' Do not use the holiest of names lightly.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 18:1

<sup>4</sup> Gen, 1-2

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Martha has misread the situation. When Jesus speaks, he is feeding *her*. It is not her time to serve *him*. She is being served. Just like this moment now, here. You are being served. This is not the time to be pre-occupied with business, about what you are doing after Mass, lunch to prepare, a week ahead to plan for: Christ is speaking now. Put down your pre-occupations.

Mary Potter had plenty of what we might call pre-occupations. She had a devout, but overly protective mother. She had a fine young man, Godfrey King, whom she was engaged to be married. She was of poor health, with constant chest complaints and fatigue. She thought she had a vocation to the Sisters of Mercy, until her weak health sent her home after only a year. But this charming, gracious, prayerful and humorous young lady had an idea, a divinely fixed idea, to serve the poor. She told her family. They, to quote one of her biographers, thought it ‘*absurd, wild, impracticable; they condemned, despised, misjudged it.*’<sup>5</sup>

Mary endured years of trials, and upsets. Then, on 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1877 standing on the rail platform in Brighton, waiting for the train to Portsmouth, she recollected the reading at Mass, ‘*Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?*’ Instead of taking the train to Portsmouth, she travelled the next day up to Nottingham, where she would establish the ‘Little Company of Mary’ for the sick and the dying. Of course it was not straight-forward, but now she knew her course. After much listening and responding,

listening again and responding, the work she was called to accomplish was laid before her. Soon, I am sure, as it was for Abraham, there will be the appropriate time for you to rise and respond. Not a time to be simply busy or occupied, but a time for you to take up the challenge of encounter that God comes to meet you in.

As we wait, we are preparing in prayer. We lift up our hearts first, and then our hands.

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<sup>5</sup> Ripley, Rev. Francis, *The Mary Potter Story*, (Glasgow, John Burns and Son, 1954) p7.