

message to you, the message which was a mystery hidden for generations and centuries and has now been revealed to his saints. It was God's purpose to reveal it to them and to show all the rich glory of this mystery to pagans. The mystery is Christ among you, your hope of glory: this is the Christ we proclaim, this is the wisdom in which we thoroughly train everyone and instruct everyone, to make them all perfect in Christ.

■ The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

cf. Lk 8:15

Alleluia, alleluia! Happy are they who have kept the word with a generous heart, and yield a harvest through perseverance. Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Lk 10:38-42

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

Martha took up the duties in the house. Mary chose the better part.

Jesus came to a village, and 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 said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do 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; it is not to be taken from her.'

■ The Gospel of the Lord.

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Reflections on the Gospel

CHOOSING THE BETTER PORTION

Two sisters, Martha and Mary, give hospitality to Jesus. Martha appears to be the dominant personality, perhaps the elder. Certainly, her hospitality is more active and practical. Her sister Mary simply sits at Jesus' feet and listens. This sets up the kind of 'triangular' pattern often found in scenes in Luke's Gospel: Jesus interacts with a character, usually someone in a marginal situation; a third character takes offence at this and grumbles. Jesus defends the more marginal party, showing how their action is the more appropriate in view of what he has to bring.

In this case, it is Mary whom Jesus defends. Martha fusses about preparing many dishes. (Think of non-Western cuisine when several different dishes—fish, chicken, lamb, vegetable, etc.—are placed before guests all at once.) Jesus points out that just one dish would have been enough. Drawing a metaphor from the meal, he states that, by simply listening to him, Mary has 'chosen the better portion'—that is, of the 'meal' that *he* is providing.

Many readers of this episode, especially women, side with Martha. Her complaint is very reasonable.

But this is precisely the point. Frenetic service, even service of the Lord, can be a deceptive distraction from what is most appropriate. Good people often measure their goodness by all they do for the Lord, forgetting that nothing that they can ever do could match all they need to receive. The Lord's primary intent towards us is to bestow life, love and salvation. That is the 'better portion' that Mary understands and receives.

Brendan Byrne, SJ

THE SAVING WORD

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME / C

21 JULY 2019

FIRST READING

Gen 18:1-10

A reading from the book of Genesis

Lord, do not bypass your servant.

The Lord appeared to Abraham at the Oak of Mamre while he was sitting by the entrance of the tent during the hottest part of the day. He looked up, and there he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them, and bowed to the ground. 'My Lord,' he said 'I beg you, if I find favour with you, kindly do not pass your servant by. A little water shall be brought; you shall wash your feet and lie down under the tree. Let me fetch a little bread and you shall refresh yourselves before going further. That is why you have come in your servant's direction.' They replied, 'Do as you say.'

Abraham hastened to the tent to find Sarah. 'Hurry,' he said 'knead three bushels of flour and make loaves.' Then running to the cattle Abraham took a fine and tender calf and gave it to the servant, who hurried to prepare it. Then taking cream, milk and the calf he had prepared, he laid all before them, and they ate while he remained standing near them under the tree.

'Where is your wife Sarah?' they asked him. 'She is in the tent', he replied. Then his guest said, 'I shall visit you again next year without fail and your wife will then have a son.'

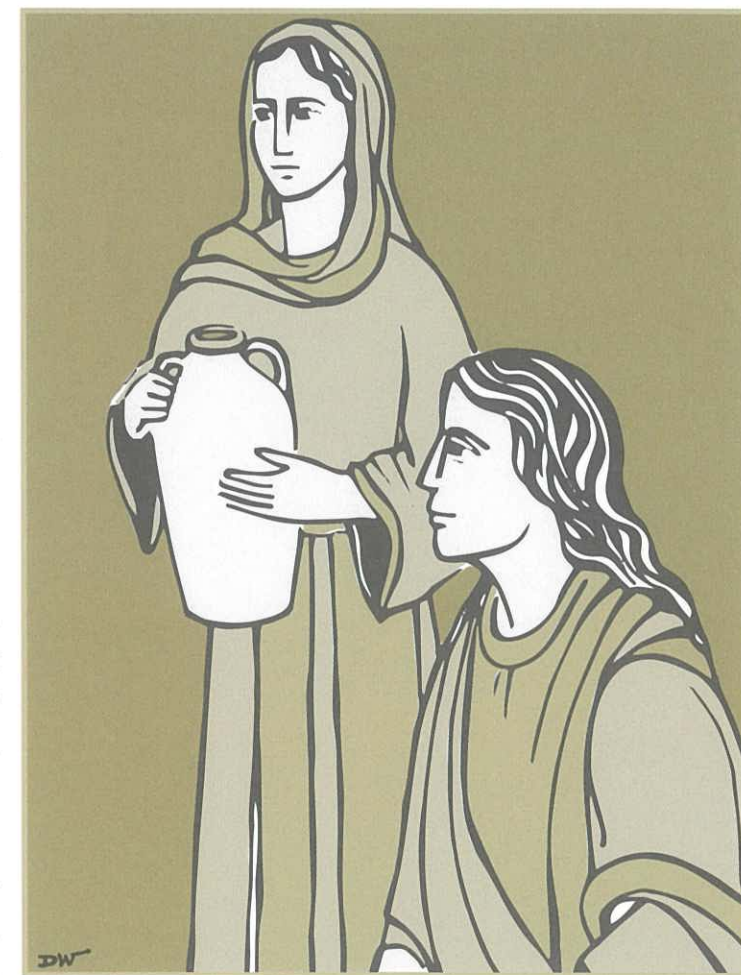
■ The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 14:2-5. R. v. 1

R. The just will live in the presence of the Lord.

1. Lord, who shall dwell on your holy mountain? / He who walks without fault; / he who acts with justice / and speaks the truth from his heart; / he who does not slander with his tongue. **R.**



2. He who does no wrong to his brother, / who casts no slur on his neighbour, / who holds the godless in disdain, / but honours those who fear the Lord. **R.**

3. He who keeps his pledge, come what may; / who takes no interest on a loan / and accepts no bribes against the innocent. / Such a man will stand firm for ever. **R.**

SECOND READING

Col 1:24-28

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Colossians

The mystery hidden for centuries has now been revealed to his saints.

It makes me happy to suffer for you, as I am suffering now, and in my body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church. I became the servant of the Church when God made me responsible for delivering God's