

Dear Parishioners,

We are spiritual beings called to lives of prayer and holiness. Prayer is a discipline that requires time and effort. Through prayer, however, we grow in a more loving relationship with God. Since we are all unique in the ways we relate with God we have to develop our own patterns for prayer. The gospel for this weekend gives us a couple of ways to look at our own spirituality.

As Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem he stopped to visit the home of some friends in Bethany, which was a little over a mile away from Jerusalem. Two sisters lived in that home: one named Martha, the other Mary. Jesus was seen as a real dignitary. He was a rabbi, a great teacher, and of course Martha and Mary saw him also as a dear friend, so it was very important that he be greeted with the best hospitality they could offer.

So often we tend to look at prayer as a distinct type or format that must be followed and adhered to. When we look at prayer in this way the discipline required makes it seem less than inviting or welcoming. But when we look at prayer as a way for us to show God our hospitality, that God is truly welcome in our lives, then all of a sudden it takes on a whole new meaning. Both Martha and Mary show the importance of welcoming Jesus into their home. But they use different methods of showing hospitality.

Martha chose the more conventional form of hospitality. The woman's place was in the kitchen preparing the food and making sure everything was ready for a good meal. Women in that day were not allowed to socialize with guests, especially male guests (unless there were no other males in the house). Therefore, from a social point of view, their role was to show hospitality by making sure everything in the house was just right. Women in Jesus' day worked hard behind the scenes to make their guests feel welcomed. Their work was active, it took a lot of effort, but proper hospitality usually does require a lot of work.

Martha's type of hospitality can be very spiritual. Sometimes we can look at our own prayer lives and see that our work can be a prayer if we welcome God into our daily lives. I think of Dorothy Day who spent decades of her life establishing the Catholic Worker movement in New York City and in many other parts of the country. She made it her life's work to welcome Christ by feeding the poor, giving them shelter, and providing for all of their basic needs. She also devoted her life as one who worked for peace and justice in a world of extreme violence and greed. So, our daily work lives can be a profound form of prayer when

we are willing to welcome Christ in. But Dorothy Day also devoted long periods of her daily life to silent prayer.

Mary, Martha's sister, also welcomed Christ with a splendid form of hospitality. She saw him as teacher and so she took on the role of student. She spent her time with Jesus listening to what he had to say. Her form of hospitality was more passive, but it was essential. What better way to welcome Jesus into our lives than to simply be with him in silence, listening to what he has to say to us.

Mary's is the prayer of the contemplative. I think of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, who was a cloistered Carmelite nun. Her order was devoted entirely to silent prayer. There were, of course, daily tasks that always needed to be done but her health was poor, and she was too sick to be able to do any kind of physical labor. She wanted to be a missionary. She would have loved to devote her life to serving the needs of the poor as many of her confreres did. It was a great disappointment to her that she was not able to be more active. She realized, however, that doing something as simple as picking up a piece of paper off the floor out of love for Jesus would make that simple act something beautiful for God. And so she learned to see Jesus in the simplest ways. Doing nothing physical at all, her life became a prayer because she found Jesus in the silence and she learned to love him with her entire being – in that silence.

So often we take hospitality for granted simply because we have social norms that tell us what is acceptable in being gracious and welcoming. Sometimes we go to great lengths to make sure everything is just right for our guests. Sometimes we don't care so much about the details as we do just being with our guests. And sometimes we find it hard to welcome guests at all. Prayer is our way of acknowledging that we are in the presence of God. God is always in our midst. God's great desire is that we should always be near. Our own effort requires us to prayerfully welcome God into our lives. Sometimes prayer is very hard work and sometimes it is as simple as listening in silence. We decide how we can best welcome God into our daily lives.

In joyful hope,  
Fr. Tim Seigel