

## Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (c)

Fr. Azam Vianney Mansha, CJM - STL

Dear sisters and brothers,

The two prominent characters in today's Gospel passage are Martha and Mary. Throughout the centuries, these two characters symbolize the two ways of serving in Church, which are more commonly known as "*ora et labora*" (to pray and to work). Martha, who is busy with many things, stands for the active life, whereas Mary, who is peacefully sitting at the feet of the Lord and listening to Him, represents contemplative life in the Church. Which character or way of life do you think brings one closer to Jesus?

Often, people think that Jesus rebuked Martha and appreciated Mary more because Jesus said to Mary, "Mary has chosen the better part" (Luke 10:42). However, we must not forget that it was Martha's strong faith in Jesus that actually brought Lazarus back to life! Martha confessed, "You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27).

So what is going on in this Gospel passage? What is often overlooked by readers and theologians? I believe that the heart of today's Gospel passage is Jesus' response to Martha, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things" (Luke 10:41).

No doubt, Martha was anxious and worried about many things, but Jesus did not rebuke her for her work or hospitality. In fact, Jesus brought her attention that "there is only one thing needful" (Luke 10:41) and that is "to attentively listen."

Now there are many definitions of the word "listening," but the best definition of listening actually comes from my mother. When I was a child, my mother used to tell us, "Azam, do not use your mind, just follow my instructions." It took me years to understand what she actually meant and I would like to share with you through a simple exercise.

Please raise your right hand and measure your right ear and bring it in front of you. Now, please raise your left hand and measure your left ear. After doing that, please bring it in front of you and put it together with your right hand. Now, putting them together, what does it become? It forms into A HEART.

So, when Jesus turned towards Martha and said, "You are anxious and worried," it was actually a reminder for her to bring one more thing in her service; and that is, to bring her heart in her service. When our heart is in our service, we do not get anxious and worried about other things. Mary brought her heart in her service, and that is listening to Jesus with an undivided heart.

There are many moments in our lives when we need to put aside our anxiety and worrisome attitude. Once we revisit our prayer life, we will come to realize that not only is our daily life full of anxiety and worries, but our prayer life has also become that way too! Why? Because our prayer has become a shopping list: "God, can you do this for me? God, please get this for me. God, let this happen for me." The list can go on and on. We just need to recall the words of Jesus: "There is only one thing that is needed;" and that is, to listen to the Lord like the prophet Samuel, "Speak, O Lord, your servant is listening." I believe this powerful reminder is what we need from time to time.

In March 2015, I was headed to the Philippines for the first time. I was ready with all my documents and travel requirements. The day of my flight arrived, but since my flight was still near midnight, I asked my younger sister if she could wash my shoulder bag for me. I did not realize that my passport was in it and my sister also did not check it first. She took my bag and put it directly into the washing machine. When I realized that my passport was in that bag, it was too late!

The passport was not completely damaged, but my visa was ruined. I did not have the heart to go to the airport anymore, but my family and friends encouraged me to try and explain what happened. When I went there, I explained to the airline personnel and they were kind enough to understand my situation. They allowed me to board once I received the approval of the immigration officer. However, the latter did not allow me to leave the country. He instructed me to get a new passport. I tried to explain, but he did not listen. So I went back to the check-in counter to claim my luggage. After waiting for 2 long hours for my luggage, I headed back home filled with anxiety. How could I expedite the release of my new passport? When would I be able to get on the next plane out of Pakistan? So many things ran through my head! I was filled with so much worry!

The next day, I went to the passport office where they asked me to bring my National Identity Card (NIC). To my surprise, when I went back home, I was unable to find it. As you know, once we lose something in the house, we will only find it on the judgment day!!! So, I went to the National Database Office to apply for a new NIC. To my surprise again, they told me that I could not get my new NIC because according to our birth certificates, my younger brother was born just 3 months after me! In my heart, I said, "Wow!!! Mama is Superwoman!!!" They told me to go to the local court for a birth certificate correction. Only after that would I be able to get my NIC and new passport.

I felt hopeless. My concern was mounting and my anxiety was killing me! When my mother saw me, she smiled at me and said, "Don't be anxious and worried. Jesus will make a way. You just need to do the Marian pilgrimage." As you already know, when Mama says something, that is the law. So I went. I poured my heart out at the shrine.

On my way home, I met a man who, although not a Christian, would faithfully go to the church where I would preach on Tuesdays as a theology student. He approached me and introduced himself. He told me, "I appreciate your preaching." To tell you the truth, I was not listening to him because my heart and mind were preoccupied with my passport. Anyway, he gave me his business card and invited me to visit his office. To my surprise, he was an officer at the passport office! So, I went there the next day. His personal secretary did not allow me to enter because, according to her, I did not have an appointment. I took the chance and insisted that she inform him of my arrival, after which he immediately came out of his office to receive me warmly.

I immediately told him the purpose of my visit and gave him my documents, which he instantly gave to his secretary. He then started talking about the Bible and asked me to explain about the death of Lazarus. If you could only see me then! I was so torn because my passport was at the forefront of my mind! Anyway, with all my anxiety and worries, I did my best to explain how Lazarus died and came back to life. At the end of my story, you will never guess what happened! His secretary came out with my brand new passport!!! I immediately recalled the words of Mama, "Don't be anxious and worried. Jesus will make a way." It was an important reminder for me that anxiety and worries take us away from Jesus, whereas listening with the ears of our heart brings us closer to Him.

Let us never forget the words of St. Benedict: "*Ora et Labora*;" and that is, the heart of prayer and work is listening to Jesus with the ears of our heart without any anxiety and worries.

May Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother, intercede for us to always listen to Jesus with the ears of our heart in order to get away from anxieties and worries.