Saints Martha, Mary and Lazarus Show us the Balanced Life

In Luke's Gospel, we have the story of Martha and Mary, and when we hear it, Martha at first seems to be treated a little harshly. The Gospel tells us:

Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me." The Lord said to her in reply, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her." (Luke 10:40-42).

As someone once said to me hey Martha has a good point, for if you just sit about the house all day how will the work get done. That's a fair point. But there's a reason the Church celebrates both women as saints, namely because both the active and prayerful or contemplative lives are part of our spirituality.

Last week, on Monday, July 29th, we celebrated Martha's feast day, which in 2021 became the feast day of Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus who shared a home. I thought that was a great move by the Holy Father because from the 3 saints, we learn the importance of first and foremost welcoming Jesus into our homes and hearts, and balancing the importance of work and service with that of prayer and quiet time and even time for rest and leisure.

The point from this Gospel passage is simply that God is meant to take priority in our lives; and Jesus being here with them in their home, has something far more important to give them then the reward coming from finishing household chores. How often we as humans can become busy all the time, to the point of being a workaholic, or over-scheduling ourselves or the family. That said, work and being active play a very important role.

I grew up during the papacy of John Paul II, and if you search through some of his writings, it's clear that not only was he an incredible pope and good at bringing God's love into the world, but also an incredible mind.

In 1981, he penned the document "Laborem Exercens," which focuses on human labor.

In it, he states: *"Labor is participation in the work of the Creator and the Redeemer. Jesus Christ looks upon work with love because he himself was a laborer."* He also says: *"Work is a good thing for man - a good thing for his humanity - because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being'*

One of the points the Holy Father makes in this document is that work can be a good thing. We are created to care for the earth. The problem is our understanding of work has run amuck at times throughout history. People have used other people; governments have oppressed people; and other times work has taken over. And other

times, in our lives, we might get too focused on our work so much so that, despite trying to do the good thing for ourselves and one another, we lose sight of deepening our relationships with God and one another almost so much so that their voices can be drowned out. Sometimes we work so hard, we become not more of a human being, but more of a cog. This is where Saint Mary comes in - she understands God takes priority.

In essence, in that Gospel, Martha is anxious and worried about many things. She cares about our Lord, and wants to make Him feel at home. But He's simply reminding her that one thing is above all else: listening to God's word. Martha will also be there when Jesus comes back after Lazarus dies and raises him, and show deep faith in Jesus as being the Christ, the Son of God.

Taking a look at Martha, we can ask where does work fit into our lives? I know so many people who are so caring and work so very hard, but with such busyness, at times work can take over. People run from school to appointments to practice or from the office to a committee meeting to a dinner party only to do it all again the next day. We need to make sure we slow down and take time to hear God's voice, and make time for prayer. That's why the early Christians gathered on the Lord's day – they would receive the Eucharist first, and then after that go out into the world to live their lives.

With respect to Mary though, it is also important to have time for rest and leisure; to have a family meal or game night, real conversations, and doing things with loved ones that bring joy, and also even time for just silence, peace and quiet. And of course, regular time to be with the Lord; to come to Mass and not say we are too busy, or that our "work is our prayer." Even just a few moments a day makes such a difference to help us spiritually.

Work also is a part of life, and there are some who live in contemplative orders, and pray most of the day. But even these religious often assist in tasks in their community. It is great to hear God's word, but we also have to put it into action. I encourage people to always try to find balance, and not let work get out of control, but also to be mindful that work is important. Through our work, we bring glory to God, and also teach. As I've said before, in my life while I've learned so much from seminary, I've also learned invaluable lessons in seeing people like my parents, who worked hard day in and day out and came home to make our house look good, and quietly helped family and our church in so many ways. Similar stories are shared in countless families, as when we look to the people around us and how they lived their lives, they have in so many ways glorified God through their labor.

The Christian life is both active and contemplative – we need to hear God's word but we also have to leave the house and live life. Hopefully we always have balance in both and take a page from both Saint Martha and Mary, hearing God's voice and making that voice known by glorifying God through our actions.

Have a blessed week!

Fr. Paul