

Mary chose the best, and this will not be taken away from her ...

Martha and Mary: two ways of being before God

Homily, 17th July, 2016

Luke 10,38-42

father G. Paparone o.p.

We listened to this wonderful passage from the Gospel, a passage that has typically only reported by Luke, like the one of this past Sunday.

We may say that this passage is a long-lasting classic of spiritual literature and history of spirituality, because many monks and disciples of our Lord as well as many people committed with their spiritual life wanted to see in it two different ways of interpreting religious life: life in contemplation and active life.

Indeed, these two forms exist also in religious tradition:

- Those who contemplate, in general are defined “monks”, and are those who go in the forests or in the desert like the hermits;
- Religious people with an active life, who began taking this stance in the 1200 and became increasingly active.

Yet, in actuality, in ancient times, at the time of our Fathers from the Desert, these two phrases existed already: *practical life* (active life), and life in contemplation.

This is definitely one way to interpret this passage and this offers some hints, yet it may be slightly reductive wanting to interpret it in just one way. At least, this can be good to justify an *a priori* choice that religious people might have made.

Actually, if one reads this passage well, we can see that there is a further teaching into it, a greater one, and I believe a useful teaching not only to the clergy and the monks, but for all.

Now, these two women and sisters can really be interpreted as the *symbolic images of two ways of being before God*.

One is, we may say, the way of those who try to live, plan, build and implement their religious lives as a *religion on performance*: God is there and we must pay tribute to Him, comply with the commandments as well as many other things to do.

A religion where the centre is not God as such, but our trying to do things to please Him, to try to come to terms with our conscience, or to try to have from Him what we are looking for.

I invite you all today as well as during this coming week if you may to try to understand:

What is my way of being before God?

When I am face to face with God, what am I looking for?

What is my relationship with God?

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What am I doing?

Why am I doing what I am doing?

Let us analyse Martha for a while. What does she do?

As soon as she hears that Jesus is coming along – Jesus is going to Jerusalem and sends before Him his disciples to prepare the village dwellers to his coming – she greets Him, calls Him, and wants to serve Him. For sure, Martha is a woman who understood well who Jesus is. She is fully committed to doing whatever she believes it is right to do to please God.

She gets into the house with Him and starts serving Him.

Jesus starts talking with Mary, her sister, and she listens to His words and teachings.

At this point, what does Martha do?

She goes to our Lord and asks Him for her sister's help.

Here is the teaching.

The Lord says: *Martha, Martha you are getting busy ...*
You are concerned and take trouble for lots of things ...

I believe that Jesus' statement must not be related only to that very moment.

The Lord, as often stated in the Gospel, knew the thoughts of men and knew what is in their hearts. He often anticipated the dialogue, and elicited some reactions with the scribes and Pharisees because, - so states the Gospel – The Lord knew what was in their hearts, he knew what they were thinking.

Well, here's the teaching, the remark made by Jesus is not a reprimand, and maybe it goes beyond it and focuses on Martha's psychological attitude since she is one of those people who take trouble in doing lots of things... of good things...

These are people who maybe taken by all this troubled life and in their quest for pleasing God and serving Him do not make the most of the moment when God wishes to say something to us.

Like if you all would come to church everyday, would stay an hour, but you were the only ones speaking and doing the talking.

Example: one may say, well she is a very religious and good person! She goes to church everyday and prays for ill and unemployed people and her relatives... She prays, prays and talks and talks and later she goes home...

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Did she meet God?

Maybe not...

Maybe one goes to church and stays for an hour, and also at Mass, yet does not meet with God, God is not listened to.

Because, in order to listen to God, one must be silent.

Be silent!

One has to take this attitude: **"My Lord, speak for your servant is listening"** (cf. 1Sam 3,10).

Well, for sure Martha did whatever needed be done: she called Jesus, and invited Him at home.

Yet, paraphrasing and analysing God's words to her, we may interpret it as follows: "Be good, it does really matter whether we are not being served starters, first and second courses, dessert and fruits. It's fine! A sandwich will do!"

Having a conversation is more important.

What we say, the love we can swap is far more important than doing many things..."

The same goes for God: HE KNOWS perfectly well everything.

Indeed, one day Jesus said: when you pray, do not take trouble, do not worry; *God knows already what you need well before you ask Him* (cf. Mat 6,8).

When you pray, say: *Our Father in heaven, Thy will be done!* (Mat 6,10).

Today, I wish to ask you:

In your prayers, in how many of them you say: Lord, Thy will be done?

Lord, what should I do, what do You suggest?

How should I take this situation?

Opposite to the above, the other attitude we have is: Lord, I need this or that, do this, and why you did not do that?...

A "prayer" during which we spend our time just asking and asking...

As if we had to convince Jesus to give us what we need!

Also if it were possible to do so, why should we try to convince Him, why should we in a position to deserve...? Anyhow it is not like that, since Jesus knows all before.

I believe that the **teaching of the Gospel today** and addressed to all and not only to the clergy, **is to be able of making one step forward in our relationship with God.**

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Well, you believe, you embrace God, you come to church, you pray...

Now: KEEP QUIET, LISTEN... listen to what God says.

Martha, Martha, you are taking trouble!

Another version says: *you get worried, you take trouble for many things, yet one is the thing we need...*

And, what is that we all need?

Once we invite Jesus at home, or we went to His home, what is the only thing we need?

LISTEN.

LISTENING AND PUTTING INTO PRACTICE.

What does it mean listening to us now?

Indeed, become listeners.

Go to church not so much to tell God what He is supposed to do, because sometime we sound better than God, more intelligent than God, wiser than God and we all know – and always so – what God must do...!

As of today, let us go to church knowing that there is Someone who loves us, who embraces us and waits for us and wish to educate us...

Let us drop the idea of a religion based on presentations and let us take dialogue and listening and love.

One day, someone asked the Parish of Ars, who used to spend hours in the church: I see you in front of the cross with no prayer book or anything else...

But, what do you tell God?

And he answered: but I say nothing, *I look at Him, and He looks at me...*

Let us ask God to be granted this loving, contemplative look and may he get us out from our trouble to finally be able to embrace our salvation and love.

May Jesus Christ be praised.