



How do we welcome the Lord

In the Gospel today, Luke briefly presents the portraits of two women. Martha, the lady of the house was very hospitable, active and generous. It would be unfair to assume that she was preoccupied with secondary tasks.

Then Mary is presented briefly as she sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him. Mary actually took on a role that was normally reserved for men since women of that era were responsible for domestic tasks. There is no criticism or blame in this story.

The discussion arose when Martha intervened. She complained that her sister had not followed her example or fulfilled the role that society assigned her. In his response, Jesus didn't support Martha's assessment. Mary had made her choice. Martha should not have counted on Christ to send her sister back to the kitchen, i.e. to tasks that were deemed legitimately and culturally appropriate.

Jesus' response has inspired several opinions. There is always the debate between choosing an active or a contemplative life, between giving and receiving. We can appraise the situation another way: we love God and then our neighbor, which appears as a corollary to the parable of the *Good Samaritan* found in Lk 10:25-37.

But Martha's frustration brings up another consideration. Her role was to perform tasks, to serve, but according to Jesus, *Mary has chosen the better part*. We give because we have received from God and others and we continue to receive. Mary's intention was not to engage in a competition with her sister. If we use Mary as a model of someone who chose *the better part*, we still look for ways to give and receive. Mary was solely concerned with welcoming God's Word.

The "*Martha*" in us should not be criticized, but her comment initiates a discussion. Complaints and frustration arise when we no longer know how to welcome people or allow ourselves to be loved, when we are uneasy with what others offer us, when we become trapped in duty and service. Mary's experience was to welcome Christ. Our Lord came to serve, not to be served. According to Christ, *the better part* of the Christian experience is to receive God's Word and acknowledge its significance.

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