

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 18, 2010

Father Dick Rossman

Luke 10:38-42

Today we have two scriptures speaking to us about hospitality. Each of us has experiences of wonderful times receiving hospitality and we have had plenty of experiences of attempting to give hospitality.

One of the unusual experiences I have had took place when I was invited by a priest to come to his place for supper. I was looking forward to being with him. But when I arrived there were other guests already present and more guests arrived later. I thought there would just be the two of us and so I was a little angry that he failed to give me the correct information.

There were several unusual things that happened at this meal. The first reality was that we were all strangers to each other. I wonder if our God has the same plan for the eternal banquet? When you meet a new person it often is difficult to know how to start a conversation. When everyone present is attempting to find something that interests others there may be some silence in the room. This gathering of strangers did not end just with us being strangers. We also were from different towns and ways of living life. We had a couple of homeless people along with a couple who came dressed for the opera.

The other different part of this experience was that the host spent almost all of his time creating a wonderful meal in a kitchen that was not near us. So here we were looking at each other wondering how this strange thing had happened to us and if there was any escape. I'm not sure why but I felt some obligation to try and help create a conversation.

I think most of you have heard many homilies on Martha and Mary. Generally the theology tends to say that the position of Mary is superior to the response of Martha. If we accept one way of responding to a guest, it probably has something to do with our personality rather than a decision on the best way to treat Jesus or some other guest. If the response of Mary is better, then that would mean life of the Sisters at the Carmelite Monastery west of here, living the contemplative life, is how we can best respond to Jesus. If this is true, then marriage would not be considered a sacrament, a valid

response to Jesus, nor would most of our lives be a good way to respond.

Our Gospel says that Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to him speak. We have some unusual things taking place when Mary is in this position. The position she has taken is the position of a disciple. The Rabbis taught disciples and they were always sitting at the feet of the rabbi. So Mary has taken up the role of being a disciple which means more than simply listening to what is being said.

I suppose we could say that Mary was just in awe of Jesus but Jesus was not interested in his disciples being in awe of him. He was running a training academy so that when he was absent his work would continue. At least this would be our present understanding of his work.

We should not think that when responding to Martha he is being harsh with her. He wasn't complaining about the meal she was creating so much as trying to help her understand that he wanted something more from her. He says, I can see you are worried about the meal but I want you to hear my words. The part that Mary has chosen is to be a listener. So it is okay to be active but be active and still listen to what I have to say.

The position of Mary at the feet of Jesus is our position too. It is easy for us to evaluate and choose and reject some of the words of Jesus. This is the way we read the paper, magazines, most of the information that comes to us. But if our position is of sitting lower than Jesus and accepting everything that comes from his mouth, we will receive his words much differently than if we were on the same level with Jesus.

I'm convinced that our listening skills are not very good when it comes to listening to a guest in our homes. But Jesus is more than a guest, he is our teacher. And when we listen to him it may take us a number of listening experiences with the same words in order to absorb and accept what he is giving us. Certainly hearing it read one time during the Mass is not the full listening that Jesus was presenting to Martha and is now presenting to us.

I would like to suggest for your listening pleasure, the habit of reading the Gospel several times prior to hearing it at Mass. Choose a quiet time to read the Gospel and then just be quiet and sit at the feet of Jesus so you can absorb his love.