MARY & MARTHA — THE SISTERS OF LAZARUS

June 4

Did you know that Mary and Martha represent prayer and service?

The story of Mary and Martha is an allegory for the contemplative life of prayer (Mary) and the active life of service (Martha). We are called to do both, with prayer being of the greatest importance.

One day, as Jesus was traveling with the Disciples, they stopped at the house of Mary and Martha of Bethany. They were the sisters of Lazarus, whom Christ raised from the dead (John 11:38-44), and were close friends of Jesus. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus while Martha was busy with household chores. Martha complained that Mary should help her. Jesus tells Martha not to be worried and distracted by such things and that Mary has chosen the most essential thing — prayer. Service is good; prayer is even better.

Prayer is not only what we say to God with our words, thoughts, feelings, desires, and concerns. Prayer is being quiet and still, listening and resting in the presence of God. As the Psalmist says, “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 45:11). This is what Mary is doing. This is prayer. Even when we are busy like Martha, we can still pray like this — working while being mindful of God.

It is no accident that the Gospel of Saint Luke goes from the story of Mary and Martha to Jesus teaching the Disciples how to pray. Prayer is the most important aspect in the spiritual life and is most helpful to do before, during, and after the tasks of our everyday life. Prayer is the one essential necessity.

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