



THE ENTRANCE OF THE THEOTOKOS INTO THE TEMPLE

November 21

THE GOSPEL READING

Luke 10:38-42, 11:27-28

At that time, Jesus entered a village; and a woman called Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve you alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her." As he said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!" But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

THE SERMON

Martha, Mary and Lazarus - three siblings who appear more than once in the Gospels, and who were beloved by the Lord. As Jesus entered Bethany, their village, it was their household that provided Him with hospitality, because they loved Him; and their home was a reflection of their hearts, in which the Lord was welcomed. Luke tells us that "Martha received him into her house." We know that Mary and Lazarus were her sister and brother, and yet it is described as Martha's house because she was the head of that household; she was probably the well-to-do oldest sister, and even her name



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indicates her position: in the Aramaic language, Martha is a word that means the feminine version of lord, i.e., the lady of the house. As such Martha felt the responsibility to provide hospitality to Jesus and all the other guests.

During the dinner, however, it was Mary, the younger sister, who chose to sit at Jesus' feet and listen attentively to Him. We are told that Martha, on the other hand, was *distracted*, i.e., she was *anxious and troubled*. She was the one running the household, making sure everyone's need was met, the food was cooked, the dishes were set, the Lord was comfortable, and the people were able to listen to Him. However, the one person she was not taking care of was herself.

Martha was not distracted and anxious about earthly things, worldly concerns; she was ministering to the Lord and to others with "much serving," which was an act of love. It was because of her faith that she was providing hospitality for the Lord in the first place, and it was because of her love and diligence that she was serving everyone. And we know that Jesus loved her, as we read in the Gospel of John that "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus;" and in that same Gospel, Martha gives one of the most profound statements of faith in all of the Gospels: "Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." Martha was full of faith and love, and the Lord was not reprimanding her, but rather teaching her (and teaching us) that He is the indispensable source of our life.

In her much serving Martha becomes anxious and, feeling the pressure of taking care of everyone else, she felt anxious and alone, even isolated. She says, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve you alone?" She felt that way because she, at that moment, had lost focus on the "one thing needed," i.e., the Lord Himself. Far from reprimanding her, Jesus in his love brings her back from isolation and frantic service: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her."

The One Thing needed was the Lord Himself, found in *worship* (Mary was sitting at His feet) and in *discipleship* (Mary was listening to His teaching). Martha was not to blame for being busy and serving, since she was doing it as an act of faith and love; what she needed however, was the Author of life, the Lord himself, to be the source of her life before she could serve others. As Saint Cyril said, "*Does anyone then blame her for being occupied with careful service? By no means. For neither does the Savior chide her for having proposed to herself the discharge of this duty; but rather He blamed her, as one who was laboring in vain, by wishing to procure more than was necessary . . . For far better is that other part, of earnestly desiring the divine doctrine.*"

Many of us can identify with Martha, as we all seek to provide for our families, for our loved ones, for our Churches and communities; and rightly so, because the more we love, the more we serve, and this is what pleases the Lord and unites us to Him and to each other. However, we must never lose sight of the fact that the Lord Jesus says to us, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (cf. John 15).

Mary was abiding in the Lord Jesus because she was sitting at his feet worshipping and listening, learning from Him. *"It is not of Mary simply that she sat near Jesus, but at His feet, to show her diligence, steadfastness, and zeal, in hearing, and the great reverence which she had for our Lord"* (Saint John Chrysostom). Likewise, our entire lives, and all our service, all our work, all our relationships, even our faith, love, and strength, depend entirely on our relationship with the Lord. This relationship needs to be nurtured *daily* – in prayer, in worship, and in the Scriptures. He is the One Thing needed, and if we have Him, abide in Him, are united to Him in prayer, and learn from His Word – which renews our minds and hearts – then we are able to serve Him and serve others without anxiety, distraction, and burning out. He is the source of our entire lives. Saint Ambrose of Milan says: *"May you then like Mary be influenced by the desire of wisdom. For this is the greater, this is the more perfect work. Nor let the care of ministering to others turn your mind from the knowledge of the heavenly word, nor reprove or think indolent those whom you see seeking after wisdom."*

It is in the life of contemplation of Him that we can be empowered to a life of action. Communion with the Lord is the best portion in this and in the next life. The service required of all of us in this life can only be fruitful if it comes from our daily encounter with Him. As Apostle Paul says: *"For now, only faith, hope and love will remain; but the greatest of these is love"* (1 Corinthians 13:13). The love of God will always remain; and as with Mary, the love we encounter in Him when we worship Him and listen to Him will never be taken away from us. The acquisition of spiritual blessings is never lost, the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance.

It is by the One Thing needed that both Martha and Mary can live and serve, and this is true of us. This requires sitting at His feet and learning from Him. Jesus reminds us also in this passage that truly worshipping and listening to Him also requires that we keep His Word; as He replied to the woman in the crowd, *"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"* This is what the Theotokos, the Mother and the *womb that bore* Him always did. The Theotokos gave Him human life, and she received her entire life from Him; as she said, *"Whatever He says to you, do it."*