

Pentecost 6 / July 17, 2022

Luke 10:38-42

“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus were friends of Jesus. Unlike the disciples they didn't travel with Him. In the gospel of John, the sisters send Jesus an urgent message, imploring Him to come as soon as possible, saying, *“Lord, he whom you love is ill.”* Their brother Lazarus was very ill, so ill that by the time Jesus arrived he was dead and buried. They called because He was their friend and because they recognized something very special and significant about Jesus, His power to heal and give life. Martha said to Him, *“Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask God will give you.”* She knew Jesus was a very special person. More than a friend, Martha and Mary knew that He is the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world. Jesus showed the truth of their faith by calling their brother to rise to life. In our gospel, which doubtless preceded the raising of Lazarus, Jesus visits their home. How should they receive Jesus, who was both their friend and their Saviour? How would we receive Jesus, if He came calling at our home near dinner time?

In our lesson from Genesis, Abraham and Sarah receive divine visitors. Abraham immediately perceives he is in the presence of the Lord and His angels. He begs Him to stay, rest and be refreshed with food and drink. He runs for Sarah and says, *“Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.”* He runs to his herd, finds the best calf, gives it to the cook and tells him to prepare it. They must have had a different sense of time, because I don't know how that could be done quickly. But the point was they were being visited by the King of the universe. Abraham wanted to honour Him with a meal fit for the King. If Jesus came to your home, what would you serve Him? Angel food cake? Apart from lunch, how can we best honour Him as our Saviour and receive Him as our Lord? We certainly would want to honour Him with our best, but as we see in our gospel, we serve Him best when we let Him serve us first, sit as His feet and hear His word. Jesus said, *“Humans do not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”* Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Word of God, who took on flesh to serve us. He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for our salvation. He has the words of eternal life. To all who have ears to listen, His words give life!

Jesus came to proclaim the kingdom God, His righteous reign in the world, which begins now in the human heart through faith in Him. In Romans 14:17 St. Paul says, *“The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* He said that to settle a dispute between believers about the distinction between foods, which was unsettling the church. He wasn't saying food and drink have no place in the kingdom of God, but that they do not have first place. The kingdom of God is not an earthy kingdom, where physical realities are paramount. The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom, in which we look beyond things that are seen to the unseen things of God which are eternal. Mary sat at Jesus feet and listened. Jesus blessed her for hearing. His word is paramount in our lives as believers. After He finished speaking, they had dinner.

Food and drink are not the essence of the kingdom of God, but they have a place in the kingdom. When God made covenant with Israel through Moses, He invited the elders of Israel to eat in His presence on Mount Sinai. Eating and drinking were the tangible effect of the spiritual relationship the Lord effected through the blood of the covenant. Whenever they ate and drank, the faithful in Israel looked forward to the fulness of the kingdom of God, when they would feast in paradise with their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Isaiah foretold the feast saying, *“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of rich foods, a feast of well aged wine...And He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.”* The food and drink of daily living remind us of the feast to come.

The night He was betrayed Jesus instituted a meal for the new covenant, which He would make through the blood of His cross. He took bread and said, *“This is my body.”* Then He took a cup and said, *“Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the New Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”* He gave this meal to feed our spirits with His righteousness in the forgiveness of the cross. There isn’t much nutritional value in a sip of wine and a wafer of unleavened bread. In fact, if you tried to live on it for forty days, you would probably die of starvation. It is given to sustain our spirits, not our bodies. The spiritual nutrition it gives is off the chart. Whoever eats of His body and drinks of His blood in this sacrament of bread and wine, receives spiritual nourishment that will well up to eternal life. I imagine Martha was a good cook, but nothing can compare with the spiritual food Jesus provides in His word, the water of our baptism and the bread and wine of Holy Communion. These are given for the forgiveness of our sins, the refreshment of our faith and as a foretaste of the great feast to come.

If Jesus came to our home around dinner time, we would like to provide Him with a meal fit for a king, a meal fit for the King of kings. That’s what Abraham and Sarah did when they received a divine visitation. That’s what Martha wanted to do when Jesus visited her home. But Jesus has prepared a meal for us through the sacrifice of His cross. He has reserved a seat for us at the greatest banquet, in His resurrection. He offers this to us in His word. Martha did nothing wrong in wanting to honour the Lord with her banquet. But what was most necessary was that she first sit at Jesus’ feet and be fed and nourished in her spirit with His words. He is the word of life. He has the words of eternal life. He is the living bread that came down from heaven, which a person may eat and live forever. We need to eat to live, but there is no food more necessary than the food Jesus gives in His word, through the sacrament of His body and blood and in the living water of our baptism into His death and resurrection.

Consider though, how easily we are distracted by the things of this world that pass away with time and are consumed with use? Consider how often we give into the temptation to discount the power and importance of God’s word in our ears, hearts and mouths? How easily are we sidetracked by anxiety over earthly bread and like Martha overlook the bread of eternal life? In our gospel Jesus gently calls us to join Martha at Mary’s side, sit at His feet and hear His word that we may receive spiritual nourishment, refreshment for daily living and the promise of feasting with Him in paradise.

In Revelation chapter nine an angel says to St. John *“Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.”* Jesus invites us to the feast through His word. He gives us a foretaste of the feast in the water of our baptism and in the bread and wine of holy communion. There are many important things in our lives. There is a time and a place for many things. There is a time to be fed in our bodies and time to be nourished in our spirits. But nothing is more important than listening to Jesus’ word and receiving its blessings and benefits. A man said to Jesus, *“Blessed is everyone who eats bread in the kingdom of God.”* Even now Jesus feeds us in the kingdom of God with living bread through His word. Many things are needful. One thing is necessary! God bless us to join Mary and Martha and listen to Jesus. He has the words of eternal life. His words give life! In Jesus’ name. Amen