

Finding Balance

by Fr. Mark Pavlik
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This Sunday's Gospel features those favorite of all biblical sisters, Martha and Mary. I think what makes them so endearing is their humanness. They treat each other in ways that only siblings can. "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me." My, that sounds like *my* sister – and dare I say, like myself, at certain times in my life. Martha was a do-er and it appears that she did things well. What then is the problem?

I think most of us, if we are really honest, can side with Martha. We like to *do* things. Is there anything so satisfying as a "to do list" that is all checked off? Our society seems to glorify those people who can "get things done." How many times a week do we ask people, "what are you doing?" or "what did you do today?" So we can sympathize with poor Martha. We are perhaps more like her than we would like to admit.

In response to Martha's complaint, Jesus points out and compliments Mary, who sat at His feet listening to His teaching. Mary is said to have chosen for herself contemplation, which Jesus refers to as the "better part." Instead of "doing," Mary is simply "being" with the Lord.

But, to be clear, doing things is not bad. If all of us were contemplating all the time, the world would be a wreck. Even those who live contemplative lives take time for household chores. The summer I entered seminary, a friend of mine entered a cloistered religious order. She felt called to the stillness and life of contemplation. After three weeks, she returned home, having discovered that there was more to living in community than simply praying all day long. There were chores to do and time with the community. She was disappointed to learn that her life as a nun was not going to be sitting in chapel in communion with the Lord all day. A healthy spiritual life needs both – the important part is to find balance between the two.

These quiet days of summer might be just the time to consider how we are doing in our spiritual life. Are we more like Mary or more like Martha? What part of the day do we set aside to just "be" with the Lord, setting aside all those important tasks to grow closer to Jesus? No advancement in the spiritual life is without its struggle – but no genuine attempt at prayer is left unfruitful.