

JESUS SERVES US THROUGH THE CHURCH

Luke 10:38-42

When Jesus sent out the 72, He told them that they would find food and drink in homes along the way. Jesus and His disciples must have had the same experience, because as He and the disciples **were on their journey, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman by the name of Martha welcomed Him into her home.**

Martha's first thought was to serve the Lord. She wanted to make Him feel welcome in her home, as we all do when we have guests visiting us. But Mary, Martha's sister, seemed to be of a different mind. I'm sure she too welcomed Jesus, but instead of serving, Mary **kept sitting at the Lord's feet, listening to His Word.** This annoyed Martha. She **came and asked, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do the serving alone? Tell her to help me, then!"** Perhaps Martha was hoping Jesus could stop teaching for a while, while Mary helped her prepare for their Guest. Perhaps she was hoping Jesus might say something like: *"Sorry Martha. Mary, you go and help your sister and we can talk later."* The surprise is that Jesus commended Mary and scolded Martha: **"Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Yes, Mary has chosen that better part, and it will not be taken away from her."**

But let's not condemn Martha completely for what she was doing. I'm sure Jesus was hungry, and Martha loved the Lord, it's just that she had her priorities all wrong. She was busy serving Him, when she had the opportunity to be served by Him. Dinner could wait. Martha thought it was more important to serve, that was the problem.

Of course, from this, we see that listening to the Word, to Jesus Himself, is more important than serving Him. Listening to Jesus is the most important thing we do because His voice gives us eternal life. If we stop eating, we soon waste away and die. If we stop listening to His voice, then our soul soon wastes away and dies. The apostle Paul wrote: *"Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of God,"* (Rom. 10:17). Although the work is done and the forgiveness of sins is secured by the cross (John 19:30), it cannot come to us in any other way than through the Word. When Jesus was said that **Mary has chosen that better part**, what He was saying to Martha is that hearing His Word was urgent, and much more important than preparing something for Him to eat. It is urgent for us too. Like Mary, we must find ourselves sitting at Jesus' feet listening to every word that falls from His lips.

So, if it is urgent for us to hear Jesus' words, why are our church pews so empty? We have to ask the question, *"Where are all our members? Surely they can find time on a Sunday morning for an hour or two to hear Jesus' voice?"* The actual attendance to our Divine Services is only about half to two-thirds of what our baptised membership is. What's going on?

There are, I guess, some 'valid' reasons for not coming to church. True, some people get sick on a Sunday. Accidents and so forth happen that prevents people from attending. Old age and other things prevent attendance. Distance can be a problem. There are jobs that have to be done on a Sunday morning. The world is what it is and things sometimes prevent us from listening to Jesus. We sincerely have the desire to come together, and we would certainly find ourselves gathered together for worship if we could.

But let's be honest. Many simply do not make the effort anymore! Tell me; is it more important to sleep in on a Sunday morning because we have had a late Saturday night? Is it more important or easier to go and play sport or have a picnic? Do we avoid church because we don't like the pastor or someone in the congregation? What other excuses are there, and that's exactly what they are – excuses. Often we are like Martha who was busier with earthly things, ignoring the opportunity like Mary to sit at the Lord's feet and learn.

Some things can't be helped, but regular absence from church when there is no excuse shows that there is something more important in our lives than meeting with Jesus and receiving His gifts. Yes, *He serves us as the perfect Host*. Quite often, we stay in the kitchen while Jesus is preaching in the other room.

What happens in the church surely must be more important than what happens any-where else. It is in God's house where the Lord serves us as we hear that same message given to the 72 who were sent out: "*The kingdom of God has come near you,*" (Luke 10:9). The kingdom of God comes near when the Holy Spirit works through the Word of Christ to rescue sinners.

It is in the church that sinners hear the blessed news of the Gospel. In our Second Reading from before, Paul said: "*Once you were alienated from God, and in your minds you were enemies, because of your wicked behaviour. However, now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death in order to present you before Him holy, without blame, and free from accusation, if you continue established and steadfast in the faith, and are not moved away from the hope of the Good News, which you have heard,*" (Col. 1:21-23). The blessed assurance that Jesus is supreme in the world of salvation is taught in the true Christian Church. The gospel sets before us the great truth that in Christ and His redemptive work, our salvation is complete. We do not have to add one single thing. At one time in history the eternal Son of God gave His life to provide reconciliation between sinners and God. The blessings of that reconciliation are personally ours by faith, which is also His free gift to us through the gospel. The gospel reveals to us the all-sufficient Christ and connects us with Him. This is the most important thing that has ever happened in this world – all other things shrink to nothing in comparison. Jesus has come to serve us. Mary knew this, apparently Martha did not.