

We just heard in the Gospel about a squabble between two sisters. On one side you have Martha. She's the practical, no-nonsense sister who's invited Jesus and His disciples into their home. Because of their guests, she's focused on the work that needs to be done. There's a household to run, beds to be made, and meals to be cooked and served. She doesn't have time to slow down. On the other side, you have Mary. She's the impractical free spirit sister. She's the contemplative kind of person who's perfectly content with just sitting at the feet of Jesus absorbing His teachings. Nothing else in the world matters to her at that moment, not even the work that needs to be done.

Of course, there's tension between these two sisters. They're two very different women and it's understandable that Martha would get perturbed. Mary's left her in a lurch. After all, feeding 15 people is no small task, and she could've used her sister's help. We'd probably feel the same way too if we toiled away while our sister just sat idly by. We're all tempted from time to time to be envious of what others are doing when our part seems burdensome or unfair. So Martha does what most of us would do, she complains about it.

She expects Jesus to tell Mary to get up and share the workload. But surprisingly, He doesn't. He actually praises Mary, saying that she has chosen the better part by spending time with Him. However, it's important to not overlook the fact that Jesus also doesn't criticize Martha for her acts of hospitality. He doesn't say, "Stop what you're doing and come listen to my words." Mary may have had the better part, but Martha had an important part to play as well. In the end, both Mary and Martha would be blessed when Jesus raises their brother Lazarus from the dead thanks to their love and faith.

Both sisters symbolize side-by-side realities that are meant to be together – prayer and action. Separating them diminishes both. Although it's easy to pit one against the other and

choose a side, the real task is to discover their proper relationship. It's not a matter of which one is more important. It's a matter of how they complement each other.

The world needs both Martha and Mary. We need those who work to spread the Gospel and Christian values and who work for fairness and peace. We also need those who support them in prayer. We need both action and prayer. They're not rivals but allies, partners in the work of the Gospel.

Of specific importance to us here today is that this story is an opportunity for us to give some thought to the balance between prayer and action in our own lives. Martha and Mary are found in the same person. There's something of both of them within each of us – and the conflict is just as real.

Our Martha side is consumed with the work and necessities of living and surviving in the modern world. There's schoolwork to complete, careers to establish, mortgages to repay, food and clothing to pay for, college tuitions to cover. The Mary within us longs to spend more time with our children, to be able to give more of ourselves to causes we believe in, and to turn off the world to be at peace with God. But our Martha side is always there to remind us of our responsibilities: the to-do list that's never completed, the calendar that's always full, the deadlines that loom. There never seems to be enough time in the day to possess the better part. Yet, our Mary side seeks something more meaningful and purposeful in our lives because prayer and reflection give us the rudder to guide our lives. Otherwise we're like a leaf that the wind pushes anywhere it pleases.

Carving out time for prayer amidst our busy lives is important – not just coming to Mass, but the quiet prayer of just being in the presence of our Lord. We tend to neglect the call to be

still in prayer in favor of being on the move. We want to be busy doing things. In other words, we want to be like Martha.

Now, I'm not suggesting that we ignore the responsibilities of our active lives. Being the hands and feet of Christ in the world is a good thing. But when we find ourselves anxious, worried, or resentful as we go about our lives, it may be helpful to remember the words of Jesus spoken to Martha - choose the better part; which isn't the part that's left over when everything else is done. It's a connection to God and a relationship with Him that's a priority in our lives. Jesus invites each one of us to make a place for the better part - to find an inner space within ourselves where we can sit at the feet of the Lord, even as we do the dishes, or drive to work, or whatever activity we're involved in. We have to consciously choose and seek out the better part.

As Catholics, we have a multitude of ways of living this ideal: morning Mass, the rosary, meditation on the scriptures, even something as simple as breathing the name of Jesus, prayerfully, as we wait at a traffic light or in the checkout line at the grocery store. For a Christian, taking the time to pray is the most invigorating thing we can do for our soul. When the world pulls us in a thousand different directions, prayer draws us back to Christ to listen to Him. Time spent with the Lord is our shelter in any storm.

The most powerful prayer is time spent in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament because time spent with Jesus changes us. It reminds us that everything in our lives has purpose when we're close to Him. If you don't believe me, ask one of the high schoolers who went on the Steubenville Youth Conference trip last weekend how they felt when Jesus was processed past them in a monstrance up and down the aisles of a 5,000 seat arena. We're blessed in this parish. We don't even have to go anywhere to find a Perpetual Adoration Chapel where we can always come to spend time with our Lord, no matter the hour of the day.

We all need a healthy balance in our lives between action and prayer. We're called to serve like Martha, as we heard a couple of weeks ago in the Gospel – the harvest is abundant but the laborers are few. And yet, like Mary, we also need times where we're sitting at the Lord's feet: looking at Him, letting Him look at us, and listening to Him.

Not everyone is called to spend 4 or 5 hours a day in prayer, like the Carmelite nuns do. But every single one of us is called to at least have some sort of prayer life outside of Mass. We can't follow Jesus if we don't love Him. And we can't love Jesus if we don't know Him. And we can't know Jesus if we don't spend time with Him in prayer. Knowing about Jesus is not the same as knowing Him and having a relationship with Him.

Brothers and sisters, the call for prayer to complement our active lives is for us to do from time to time what Mary did in our Gospel passage: take our place at the feet of our Lord, the One who loves us so much that He went to the cross for us, and simply listen to Him. He always has something to say to us. He's always thinking of us. He always wants to guide our actions. If we don't pray, regularly and sincerely, we frustrate all those desires; we shut out the grace He wants to give us.

As the Catechism says, "Prayer is a vital necessity." If we find ourselves frequently becoming frustrated, angry, and impatient in the middle of our efforts to do good things, maybe we've let ourselves become so distracted with all the serving, so caught up in the whirlwind of our activities, like Martha, that we've forgotten the reason behind them. Maybe we've gotten so busy doing the work of the Lord that we've forgotten the Lord of the work. Maybe we've started feeling like one of God's employees instead of one of His chosen sons and daughters. Prayer is the best way to remind ourselves of what and who is truly important.