

Sixteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time: Marthacized Marys

I and other priests will often mention that one of the most humbling experiences we have is celebrating the sacrament of penance. People come and seek forgiveness for their sins, and the priest acts as the intermediary with God for them. At the same time, the priest cannot help but admire the people's determination to live the faith to its fullest.

A particularly humbling experience for the priest is when the penitent speaks about his or her prayer life and notes that he or she missed morning or evening prayers. It is wonderful that we have people who are adamant to cultivate a daily prayer life. What is humbling for us priest are the questions of how often and how well we pray every day. Priests have an obligation to pray for you, our people. When as a pastor of St. Ignatius, new priests were assigned to the parish, I reminded them that their first responsibility is to pray for the people of the parish and to prepare a homily that, basically, flows from their prayers.

Many priests will say, "I'm so busy. I say my daily office, the Liturgy of the Hours. That is required. But I have a hard time for much more." Well, if a priest can give that excuse, how much more can a mother or father with little children at home and, for at least one of them, a job to maintain to support the family? The children have school, activities and then there is homework that often involves Mom or Dad's help. Parents have a responsibility to volunteer to maintain their children's programs. There is the constant, "Ma, Dad," at home.

And, yet, the Lord says in today's Gospel, "Martha, you are busy about many things. Mary has chosen the better part."

Our seniors who are retired have the luxury of being able to make time to be alone with the Lord on a regular basis. So many of them take this very seriously. And we all benefit from the graces they win for us. These seniors may no longer be holding a job, but they are working for the Lord and His people. Through their prayer life they are sustaining the rest of us. Still, our seniors often find themselves distracted by events around them. And, of course, there are health issues to tackle. There are doctor appointments and just plain bad days physically. Sometimes our seniors feel that they are being pulled in so many different directions that they wonder if they are more like Martha than Mary.

Let's take a little deeper look at that Gospel passage. We can understand Martha's frustration. Jesus shows up with at least twelve disciples. They will all need to eat. The food is not going to prepare itself, and Mary is being no help. Similarly, you might say to me, "What, I should not take care of my children, or my sick spouse, and instead go off someplace to pray? That doesn't make sense." You are right.

What we need to do is not separate the work of Martha and the prayers of Mary, but combine them. We should become Marthacized Marys. For example, a young

father once said to me that he finds it difficult to make time for prayer. The children have so many needs. I mentioned to him that I am sure it is no little chore getting them ready for bed, having night prayers with them and telling them a story when they are little. I told him to let those night prayers be the beginning of your prayers for your children and continue them even after your children get older, at least you and your wife alone. When they are little and fast asleep, I told him to consider praying in their rooms with the background music of their sleeping.

We are rightly concerned about people texting while they drive. But there is something worse than texting. Ladies, please don't put on your makeup while you are driving. I know you are doing that. That's why there are big vanity mirrors on the driver's side. How about, instead, praying while you drive? Why not have rosary beads in your car? If your work is more than fifteen minutes away, you'll have time to say a rosary. Or maybe put on a religious stations like our Diocesan Spirit FM. Basically, there are things that even a busy person can do to cultivate a daily prayer life.

I have a luxury as a priest that most of you do not have. I can schedule daily prayer in the morning, while you might be busy with taking care of children, making breakfast, etc. If you can make a bit of a prayer schedule for yourself, do so, and keep it. If you can't, then at least make the morning offering. When you wake up and wash up give God your day and ask Him to walk with you through all the developments of the day. When we walk alone in the world, we don't do so well. But when we walk with the Lord, well, I, we, can do all things in Him who strengthens us. The morning offering helps us make the entire day a prayer.

But why? Why do we need to pray every day? We need to pray because we live, as Sheldon Vanaukin writes in his autobiography, *A Severe Mercy*, we live under the mercy of God. We are dependent on God to give meaning and purpose to our lives. We recognize that the only real peace we have in our lives is the peace that comes from Him and flows back to Him, the Peace that only He can give. We need to pray because we need to adore Him. We need to pray because we need to thank Him for His many gifts. We need to pray because we always need to seek His Forgiveness. And we need to make our petitions to the Lord: prayers for our family, our marriages in your case, priesthood in my case, prayers for the sick we know, prayers for those suffering throughout the world, prayers to end the horrible events we have blasted to us in the news every day, horrible things such as sex trafficking, starvation, disease, people being denied human dignity, and so forth. We need to pray for the struggles we have in our jobs and for the struggles our children have. We need to pray for those in our families who have left the nest and now must make their own way in the world. There is much for which we need to pray.

The Lord is one of us. He shares our human nature. He understands how we can get so tied up by the demands of the day. He also knows how much we need to spend time with Him. If we can find time to be alone in silent prayer, we should treasure this time. But if we can't, we shouldn't give up on daily prayer. After all, we

don't have to choose between being Marthas or Marys. We can be Marthacized Marys, people who pray through the events of our day.