

Yesterday (29th July) I preached the sermon below on the Feast of Mary, Martha and Lazarus and with its theme of welcome and hospitality it brought home to me the Camino experience of welcome and the need to pray in these difficult times for the albergues who make the pilgrims welcome as they try to keep financially stable, with few if any guests, and on the welcome that we as a chaplaincy seek to offer to pilgrims entering the city of Santiago. In addition, some of us chaplains are aware of the welcome and hospitality that Sybille offers to us when we are on duty. Let us pray for all who would make others welcome, but who are unable to do so at the moment - and for the time when the situation will ease - Fr Bob

THE FEAST OF MARY MARTHA AND LAZARUS

John 12. 1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it). Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Sermon

When Diane and I moved into our house at Belmont Abbey I noticed that the two ladies who lived next door, Mary and Frances, had named their house 'Bethany', and I referred this to Frances on one occasion, saying "I see that you've named your house after the home of Lazarus and his sisters who lived at Bethany on the mount of Olives, you have a Mary, it is a pity that your name is not Martha!" She replied with a smile, "Yes, I know, and I don't have a brother Lazarus, but there is always a home for Jesus with us".

A home for Jesus - I wonder if we could each say that Jesus has a home with us - indeed what is a home? We understand that Jesus had a home for his childhood and possibly his youth - perhaps even into young adulthood, in Nazareth, but later he was to say that *"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."* He seemed to become almost nomadic, wandering here and there to minister, and borrowing lodgings wherever he could and from whoever, so it is good to know that Mary, Martha and Lazarus' house was seen by him to be a place where he could feel at home.

I once asked someone in Portugal where his home was - meaning where was he born and brought up. He answered, "I don't know", after some thought he added, "I reckon home is where we live now - for the moment". He too had lived a life of travel for work, being stationed at various locations around the world over the time of his working life with some bank or other, and had lost complete contact with his original home, wherever that was.



Jesus in the House of Mary and Martha, ©2011-2014 by Sam Day

The gospels describe how Mary, Martha and Lazarus gave Jesus hospitality in their home at Bethany outside Jerusalem. Jesus is said to have loved all three, and one senses that he was at home with them. The reaction towards him on occasion, from Martha in particular, indicates a familiarity.

On one occasion, as we heard in the gospel just now, Mary anointed his feet with costly oil, much to Judas's concern. On another occasion, Martha welcomed him into their home and set about acts of hospitality, preparing the table and cooking. Mary though, sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked,

‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.’ But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.’ From this, Mary is traditionally taken to be an example of the contemplative life and Martha an example of the active spiritual life.



Cristo en casa de Marta y María, by Diego Velázquez

After Lazarus' death, you'll recall Jesus delayed going to Bethany. Martha, met him on the road with a reprimand, "When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died'. I wonder, do you know Jesus well enough to reprimand him? Jesus went to the tomb and wept and was moved by the sisters' grief to bring Lazarus back from the dead.

Clearly these three are true friends with Jesus, and indeed with the twelve. They offer him a bolthole, a place where he can relax, a place where his hosts can enter into banter with him, can reprimand him, can make him comfortable - can make him feel "at home". I wonder if he was cajoled along with Lazarus into doing the washing up?



Christ teaching Mary and Martha - artist unknown

Is your house, indeed, is your life, a home for Jesus? Is it a place where he can relax knowing that he is with friends and unwind, if so, will it bring out the Martha in you as you busy yourself in your ministry, or the Mary, where you relax in his company and learn from him - or perhaps a little of each?

Amen

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