
Our gaze extended to St. Martha, lest we lose sight of what is important

In our present times, we are constantly searching for a container that will make us feel the thrill of being suspended, as in a tagada amusement ride. At times, we are afraid to stop, we are afraid to feel our feet firmly clinging to the ground. We allow ourselves to be engulfed by a multitude of noises that mute our present moment, like a swollen river, so much so that we hardly even notice those beside us. In a flurry of movement, we tend to sweep away all human element we come across, without even realising it. Indeed, it's as if Dante's verse 'Let us not speak of them, but look, and pass' were used as an invitation to disregard everyone and everything, and attend solely to our ego instead. Individual rights are no longer bound to criteria concerning care for the common good. Everyone works towards focusing on details only, disconnected from everything else... as long as all things suit themselves! We go on mulling over finding whichever solution will defend our own turf. We sound the alarm if a kitten or a puppy dog has been abandoned, we worry over finding medication to treat their cholesterol, we spend a lot of money on fat-free food... while children in developing countries have their wrists measured to check their precarious state of health caused by malnutrition. A thousand thoughts run through our minds, torrents of words that seemingly fill the void while alienating human interactions. Acronyms, variously convoluted phrases, pauses and syncopated voice messages, etc. form the overwhelming proportion of communication today. Sometimes it feels as if the speaker and the listener are actually absent, their words being lost in thin air, as the sender and the receiver, while chattering, are simultaneously absorbed in something else. The woman named Martha who opens the door of her home to Jesus, who "loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus", as we read in the Gospel of John (Jn 11:5), manifestly shows us how we sometimes tend to behave when we are caught up in a thousand things and neglect other persons. As head of the household, she does the honours for the guest, she plans everything so that the Master lacks nothing. She connects with Jesus especially on a cognitive level. Neither does she pause, she does not linger in front of him to meet his gaze, she seems to ignore his physical presence, while zealously preparing the meal. She identifies with her role, she does not let herself be guided by the meaning of her life that governs each and every instant of her existence. She needs to be recognised as perfect, for she fails to acknowledge the fact that human beings are also endowed with frailties. Her experience resonates strongly with our behaviour. Indeed, we often miss experiencing things, we are overwhelmed by anxiety, we fail to be in touch with reality, we fail to connect with ourselves in the here and now. We fail to listen to ourselves. We are frequently absent from life, while so many things happen before our very eyes and we hardly notice them. The example of an elderly woman who covers herself with a windbreaker in hot weather is emblematic of this situation. When asked: why don't you take off your jacket? She answers: it keeps me company! The puppy is to be cared for, cuddled... yet does the pet really need our cuddles, or are we the ones who are no longer capable of tenderness and seek tenderness where we are not committed to a relationship, to reciprocity, to acceptance, to self-giving? As He told Martha, Jesus' message to us is not to fret about so many things, because we may miss out on what is really important in life. He asks us not to go around in circles, to avoid missing the purpose underlying our service, not to occupy positions for the sake of exercising power, but above all not to lose the meaning of our lives. He invites us to refrain from being caught up in a partial view of life, to assess situations through a comprehensive understanding that will enable us to acknowledge our own and another person's presence. Generativity also involves dismantling the barrier that divides human relationships, in order to acknowledge and respect the threshold of each person's Mystery and choose to remain always with our fellow other. Martha's cry is also our own, especially when we lose our compass of the present moment. Captivated by efficiency alone, we become imprisoned within our own patterns. That is when we become aware of the emptiness within and around us, and we experience

confusion. The very faith that makes us see God's presence in our life often appears to grow evanescent. Hence the time inhabited by God seems to lose consistency. We are deluded into believing that everything originates with us, that every event can be decided individually, that we can govern life as we please.

Who am I, Lord? Who are You? Who are the others I meet?

Jesus affectionately invites Martha and she stops to listen: she enters an intimate relationship, regaining her focus. He likewise calls us to engage in inner wholeness, to listen to the Word, that our relationship with him may enable us to rediscover the beauty of genuine human relationships that draw us towards the Mystery. Also today, as Jesus walks with us, he invites us to live the mystique of encounter, the mystique of being together. When shall we joyfully express to each other the beauty of our human existence?

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