

16th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – C; July 17th 2022
Genesis 18: 1-10; Colossians 1: 24-28; Luke 10: 38-42

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

A few years ago a European Catholic missionary was doing great missionary work in one of the African villages. In a few years period he had baptized many people and built a church, a school and a health center; regularly he distributed food and clothes to the villagers. Owing to his restless work he fell sick and had to go back to his native country in Europe for treatment. After several months he got well enough to return to his mission and to his surprise and utter disappointment he discovered that the whole village had abandoned Catholic faith and turned to a local evangelical preacher. Even the church he built had the evangelical signboard. **“What went wrong?”** he asked himself. *“What did I do wrong?”* he asked one of his old parishioners. The truth hit home when the woman said to him, *“Father, you did a lot for us. You gave our children clothes and built up our village. But one thing you did not do. You did not give us Christ as our personal savior.”* Doing charitable work is indeed great; but giving Jesus to the people is more important.

Today’s first reading and gospel hold the theme of hospitality. We have just heard how Abraham treated the messengers of God and as a result how he got the promise of a son. In the gospel we see two sisters Martha and Mary showing Jesus hospitality in different ways. *For Martha service comes first whereas for Mary relationship is important.* Martha thought that serving the Lord by preparing a good meal would be the best way to show her hospitality. In her worry and stress to treat Jesus materially Martha totally forgot the guest whom she was trying hard to serve. But on the other hand Mary preferred personal relationship with Jesus to material hospitality. No doubt, both sisters were showing hospitality to Jesus. **If Martha had opened her home and kitchen for Jesus Mary had opened her heart to him.** Of course, Jesus was not criticizing Martha for preparing a good meal for him. Rather he was asking her to calm down and find some time to listen to him. Commenting on the material worries of the people Jesus says in **Matthew chapter 6: 33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.”** This is what Martha missed. According to the Book of **Ecclesiastes chapter 3, “There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens.”** Yes, there is a time for work, time to help others, time to relax and time to pray. When we lose the balance between these appointed times we will never be able to complete our work.

Going back to the experience of the missionary, let us see what went wrong with him. We see him working hard to uplift the poor people materially. But at the same time forgot that he was supposed to do this for the glory of God. Perhaps, personally he didn't have much time to spend with Jesus in prayer either. As a result the people had an empty feeling despite all the material help they received. This is the typical example of charitable/social work people do without giving any place to Jesus in it. So those who do the charitable work also soon lose the meaning and purpose of the work and those who receive the help too will lose the appreciation. **Mark in his gospel 3:14 tells us that when Jesus called the apostles to follow him, he called them for a dual purpose: "To be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message."** So we are called by the Lord, first of all to be with him, to know him, to have fellowship with him and be nourished by his word and, secondly, to do the Lord's work, to serve the Lord in others. *Charitable work and hospitality to someone are good and appreciated by Jesus, but if we do them forgetting Jesus, any good work will never last long.* Mother Theresa was one of the busiest persons in the world. Nobody ever did so much for the poor as she did. But she never did anything without spending time with Jesus. It is her union with Christ in prayer gave her the meaning and energy to work for the poor. Even Jesus, after a hectic day of preaching and working miracles, left the crowd now and then to go to an isolated place to converse with His Father.

Living in a busy world, very often we think that we can accomplish much if we take away the one hour we spend for the Holy Mass or the half hour we may spend for the personal prayer. Thus people find excuses to skip the Sunday Mass and personal prayers. The result is, they become stressed, overburdened and disappointed; because Jesus is not with them to help. The message of today's gospel is not that whether we choose between Mary and Martha; rather we need to choose both in our lives. We should be Mary and Martha in our Christian life. But we should keep the balance between them. Lord gives us 168 hours a week for our use and out of which he is asking from us only one hour on weekend and at least half hour a day for personal prayers. St. Francis De Sales says, **"A person has to pray at least half hour a day. If he/she is too busy then spend one hour in prayer."**

"If Christ Jesus dwells in a man as his friend and noble leader, that man can endure all things, for Christ helps and strengthens us and never abandons us. He is a true friend."- Saint Teresa of Avila