



NOW it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. ⁴¹ And Jesus answered and said unto her, *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:* ⁴² *But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.* (Luke 10:38-42)

The Church Militant (the present Church on earth) is comprised of similar elements as that Church Triumphant in Heaven. There are members of the Elect of God who have different talents and different callings in Christ in BOTH. Of course, we should make the distinction between those who feign faith in the Church, and those who are wholly committed to our Lord Jesus Christ. The latter only comprise the true Church Militant.

But our Lord has a place in the wall of His Temple for every stone – large, small, square, round, granite, marble, or alabaster. For whichever stone you are there is a void of the exact proportion in His Temple Wall for you. The Church is like a great orchestra – each performer has a part to play, and each a different instrument to reflect his special talent; but the resulting music will always be harmonious so long as each plays from the same sheet of music as all the others. As the great Baroque composer, Johann Sebastian Bach, avers, all such great music is produced to the Glory of God and is His gift through the investment of talents given the performer by Him. I doubt much of the light and sensual music of the church today can be so classified.

The focus of our devotion today is centered on the two very precious ladies of Bethany – Martha and Mary. Martha seems to be the elder of the two since the house is referenced as belonging to her. Martha was gracious to invite Christ into her home and to always treat Him with the utmost graciousness and hospitality. In fact, this family, including the brother, Lazarus, were close friends of our Lord. I believe it important to

know not only the power and Person of Christ, but also to be His intimate friend. We all must invite Him into our homes and into the Temples of our hearts.

Martha was a lady whose attention to detail would pass any Saturday morning inspection. She was diligent and meticulous in her housekeeping, and she probably resented others who were not so gifted in those endeavors. When Jesus came to visit, she was studious in making all things ready and her heart was fixed on her preparatory works as a sign of her devotion. Beyond question, she honored the Lord with her best works and loved Him dearly. Unlike many pulpit reports on Martha's works-oriented nature, there was much good in it. The Lord did not tell Martha, in the quoted text, that her works of culinary preparation were bad; He simply told her that her sister Mary had chosen the better part. To me, the best part of a chicken is the breast. That is the best part as far as I am concerned, but that does not mean that the drumstick lacks goodness. That, in a sense, is what Jesus was telling Martha. More than critiquing Martha's labors in the kitchen, I believe the Lord was lovingly counseling Martha about her attitude toward her sister and toward Himself.

Would it be unlike an older sister to harbor just a bit of jealousy over a younger sister who is fully enjoying the fellowship of a special guest while the other labored in the hot kitchen? Moreover, to Martha, more important than sitting at the feet of Jesus was the preparation of an acceptable meal for Him. It is the same with many churches of our day. They may have a great love for Christ in their beginning works even though they began with humble resources; but as they grow into what they consider a respectable institution in the community, they forget the Lord for whom they began their labors and are overly occupied with numbers, and buildings, and fund-raising. There was never anything wrong with their labors to build larger accommodations for more people unless that eclipses their testimony and fellowship in an intimate relationship with Christ.

When our work in the church begins to take precedence over our love of Christ, it is time to pause and reflect upon our intentions and attitude. If we are uncomfortable that our church is smaller than the one down the street, we may become fixed on building an edifice that will put the other church to shame. Is this the spirit we should have as Christians? God has given each of us special talents of precious coinage that we must invest; but our Lord has NEVER emphasized size and prominence of the building structure or the numbers it accommodates. Some of the most Christ-centered churches I have ever known exists in the bush country of Kenya where the people literally worship under an arbor of tree branches.

Bethany was the home village of those three close friends of our Lord – Martha, Mary and Lazarus. He frequently stopped there on his many trips from Galilee to Jerusalem and return. It was a place of rest and leisure (if our Lord ever truly had a moment of leisure). The House of Martha was prominent in that village since many wonderful things happened there.

On one occasion, Jesus attended an invitation at the house of Simon the Leper in Bethany at which Martha served – Martha was ALWAYS serving because that was the fundamental nature of Martha. Simon was not a leper in fact, but a former leper whom Christ may have healed.

There was a fundamental difference in the natures of Martha and Mary which is not unusual between sisters. Martha was practical and decisive. Mary was driven with a strong emotion of love. A further example of this difference may be seen on the occasion of their brother, Lazarus', death. When our Lord had delayed His coming until after Lazarus had lain in the tomb for four days, both Martha and Mary were despondent – not only over their brother's death, but hurt by the delay of Christ which seemed to them intentional – and, indeed, it was intentional. But neither could understand the motive of

His apparently intentional delay. Our Lord told the disciples, at the news of the illness of Lazarus, *Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.* Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, *Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.* (John 11:11-15)

It is easy to understand the hurt of Martha and Mary by the seeming remission of their friend in coming sooner. They KNEW our Lord could heal Lazarus, but now he was dead. What could Jesus do now? Martha was just as hurt as Mary, but Martha came out to meet Christ as soon as He arrived at Bethany. *Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.* (John 11:20) Mary had a tender heart that the practical often lack. She was hurt to the core and did not come out to meet the Lord. She misconstrued His purpose in delaying His coming. But Martha, being equally hurt, came out to meet the Lord. She had her own grievances to share with Christ over His delay but was convinced that the Lord would do SOMETHING. In her practical thinking, she knew the Lord had restored sight to the blind, healed lepers, made the crippled to walk; so, it meant that He could do something unusual in this loss of Lazarus in her mind. But Mary was heartbroken. She loved Jesus, and she also loved her brother. Her mind was fixed on the loss, but Martha's upon the unknown possibilities. Martha went to Mary and said, *The Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him.* This was all the emotional hope Mary needed. HE STILL CARED FOR HER! She went running and, as was her nature, *fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.* (John 11:32)

All of Martha's neighbors were gathered about weeping which Jesus saw, but when He saw Mary weeping, He was hurt in His soul, *When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him?* They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Why did our Lord groan in His spirit? It was not because of sorrow over Lazarus (for He knew He would raise him). It was sorrow over the lack of faith of one who loved Him with such a sincere heart.

There are all kinds of Christians in the Kingdom of Heaven – some emotionally oriented, others practical, some impatient, others quite decisive and firm. It takes all of these different qualities to make up the great Orchestra of Heaven. The shrill fife, the thunderous drum, the serious tuba, and the sweet violin are all need to make harmonious the beauty of music. But love trumps all other qualities as is evidenced in the life of Mary of Bethany. It was Mary of Bethany who was privileged to anoint our Lord for His burial in the Garden Tomb – that is FOR His burial, and not BECAUSE of it. All that Christ ever did was anointed by the Father, and Mary served that final anointing. *Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.* (Matthew 26:6-13)

Mary, rather than performing the mundane work of housekeeping and cooking (which are also worthwhile), preferred a place at the feet of Jesus instead. So, at the death of Lazarus, she again came forth and fell down at our Lord's feet. Perhaps we should do so as well instead of worrying about the sprouting of the seed we have planted which is the work of the Holy Spirit in the depths of the heart's soil.