**16th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C**

**17th July 2022**

**Reading I: Genesis 18:1-10**

The story demonstrates Abraham and Sarah’s hospitality to the Lord, as Martha and Mary welcomed Jesus in the Gospel. The important feature of the story is that despite three ‘men’ standing before him, Abraham addresses them in the singular, using a title he would certainly have used for God. From early Christian times, this was taken as a subtle if unconscious hint of the Trinity.

As far as the author was concerned, God would not have appeared in person, but would have sent a representative such as an angel. In the event Israel’s God was so powerful as to merit the firepower of three angels. The same ‘theophany’ is seen with the ‘annunciation’ of Samuel and Samson and the importance of Mary’s Annunciation in the Archangelic ranking of Gabriel.

**Responsorial Psalm: 14**

This psalm is one of the "entry psalms" sung as the pilgrims entered the Temple. It describes the character of the person whom God will accept as a worthy pilgrim--a person of justice, sincerity, and integrity. Abraham was known for his justice, and this psalm serves as a suitable response to the first reading.

**Reading II: Colossians 1:24-25**

The letter to the Colossians is one of those that could have been written by Paul, or by one of his circle in his name. In either case it is the product of a mind thoroughly impregnated with his thoughts as set out in Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans. But in the first sentence of to-day’s reading it also includes a most remarkable admission not found elsewhere.

It suggests that Christ’s suffering was incomplete and that Paul, amongst others can make up the shortfall. This is the only place in the New Testament where this idea is found and can hardly mean that something is lacking in the atoning power of Christ's death.

Instead, we can suppose that Paul saw his suffering on behalf of Christ as the consequence of sharing in his work. And, as the Church is the Body of Christ on earth, so its ongoing sufferings in this world will mean that Christ’s own suffering will never be complete before the Parousia.

Suffering therefore because of one’s discipleship is to be coveted above all else and since then proven martyrs have ranked highest in the calendar after the Mother of God.

**Gospel: Luke 10:38-42**

This well-known idyllic scene is placed by Luke immediately after the parable of the Good Samaritan (see last Sunday). As such it corrects the impression that might otherwise be deduced from Jesus' words to the lawyer's question: "Do this, and you will live." Most of us would feel that we have to imitate both Mary and Martha – firstly, reflecting on the word of God and then going out into the world in active service. But we must recognise that some have a primary vocation to follow Mary, others to follow Martha and this has long provided the models for the contemplative and active religious lives.

It is included in the lectionary to parallel the Abrahamic story as a lesson in hospitality. As for Abraham, he unwittingly entertained God in the guise of three strangers. Martha and Mary unwittingly entertain God in the presence of a friend.

From John 11:1 we know that the 'village' in the opening sentence was Bethany, which faced Jerusalem across the Kedron valley. It was the safe house for the disciples during Holy Week and the one to which they were returning after the Last Supper when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemene.

In John 11:1-44 the sisters have the same contrasting temperaments. The familiar relationship between Jesus and the family in Bethany, explicitly remarked in John 11:5, is here strikingly exemplified: the exasperated Martha does not hesitate to point out that it is partly Jesus' fault that she is left on her own to make all the preparations (v. 40). He gently chides her for her agitation (v.41).

There is fascinating textual confusion with regard to the words ‘*….. about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one.’* In all. there are five different manuscript readings at this point and any one of them is possible. Some translations give alternatives in the footnotes. The variations possibly resulted from scribes trying to make Jesus’ words clearer or even by moderating them.

The original reading of Luke is cautiously thought to be *'few things are needful, or only one'.* It suggests that Martha was preparing more than one dish, while one would have sufficed.

A shorter reading *'one thing is needful'*, however, may well be authentic. In this case Martha is told that the one thing necessary is the presence of Jesus, the Lord, and the word which he imparts. Mary, listening to the words of Jesus (v. 39), has chosen the more important part.

This is one of those incidents where a remembered historical detail has been preserved by use in a teaching situation but made more applicable for the catechumens.

Obviously, Mary is here presented as the ideal disciple who sits at the Lord's feet. It would be wrong however to deduce from the story a priority of contemplative over active life.

The immediately preceding parable of The Good Samaritan underlines the essential place of loving service, in action. Martha's fault is not that she is busy but that she was 'distracted' - 'anxious', 'troubled' - she had made herself too busy. Surely the lesson is that Christian service is the fruit of contemplation and not its alternative.

But of even greater significance is the exceptional fact that a woman is as much entitled as a man to receive instruction from an eminent teacher of divinity. Even the record of this detail is astonishing and illustrates the extraordinary importance that Luke places on the role of women in the story of Jesus.