

REFLECT

Ursuline Sisters
Generalate
Rue Musin 1
1210 Brussels



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A Balance between Martha and Mary

I invite you to consider the recommendation in our Chapter Direction Statement, "We will become integrated women by balancing prayer and action." One way to help as you dwell on how to balance the two is to explore the Gospel story of the two sisters in the Gospel. Martha and Mary, who live with their brother Lazarus, in a village outside Jerusalem in Bethany. They are often referred to as the sisters of Bethany.

We can think of Martha, the practical one and Mary, the contemplative one, not as individual people, but as types that represent a role, a certain behavior. Mary represents the "hearing of the word." She is the pupil listening to the teacher's words. Martha represents the role of the woman in the house, preparing meals and taking care of the domestic duties and serving others.

When Jesus came to Bethany, Martha came out of her house to welcome him. Lk.10: 18-41 As she offered him a cool drink, she said, "You are so welcome." Jesus was happy to be in a home. Martha then went to the kitchen and we can imagine the clanging of pots and pans, the smell of baking bread, and the noise of boiling water on the fire. It was very pleasant.

Martha was busy, as was Mary. Jesus let both go their way. He appreciated both, but when Martha starts to condemn her sister for not

helping her with the serving and for sitting at his feet, he speaks out. I wonder if she is hurt by his answer? He says that Mary was right in listening to him, in listening to God. It seems as if Jesus implies the good part chosen by Mary should also be chosen by Martha.

I see this as saying to us, follow Martha and Mary. Be attentive to the Lord, and also serve our neighbor. Let's compare holy leisure and idleness. Here, Mary is definitely in a holy leisure mode. She is open to all the beauty of the moment, she is listening to every word of Jesus.

In idleness, nothing goes in and nothing comes out. "We stare into space and space stares back," as one author said.



The richness of this story is portrayed in this picture which is about the experience of the Holy who touches us in the place of being Martha and Mary.

The artist Sr. Doris Kline expressed her inspiration in painting this

picture: "We, like the women in the painting, are tenderly touched by the Holy without judgment and called to a place of balance and integration, honoring the gift of who we are."

Both Martha and Mary live within each of us. So paint yourself in this picture. Martha is extended in service. Her sleeves are rolled up, her arms are extended in service. The center piece is set with flowers and a basket of fresh apples.

Do you see yourself in Martha who is very organized, efficient, not afraid to be there in service?

Notice the figure of Jesus between the two sisters. His hand is on Martha's cheek. He says: Thank you for being so organized, efficient, hardworking. His hand taps a little. Thank you. Now give it a rest, take a break, a day off.

Martha is a strong, faith filled woman, even though here she seems distracted. She is not wholly focused on Jesus, so this prevented her from receiving from Jesus what she needed. Martha wished to honor Jesus with an elaborate meal but it was more important to listen to him, and perhaps to be content with giving him a simpler meal.

Do we see ourselves in Mary who is seated at the feet of Jesus? She has flowers in her lap. The hand of Jesus is on the ridge of her back, where we carry tension. He says thank you for your attentiveness and for sitting down, taking a rest, dreaming and imagining.

Let's remember God loves us for *who we are*, not just *what we do*, even though we may stumble and are unfaithful to our own highest ideals. "You love those who search for truth. In wisdom, center me, for you know my frailty." (Ps. 51)

Contrast: If we choose to place the two in contrast to each other we notice that Mary

gives undivided attention to Jesus and she receives from the Lord, while Martha scurries about worried about the preparations.

Balance: Or we can choose to see the two in light of the balance we seek in our lives. Sometimes our life can seem like a balancing act: We long to be free of anxieties and stress, yet we are bogged down by many daily tasks. Today you have an invitation to go within yourself for balance. Be idle and be blessed and let God take care of you.

What blocks the Mary side of me from simply relaxing in the Lord's presence?

What helps me maintain a balance between the Martha and Mary sides of my life?

This prayer poem came to me several years ago. I needed to write these words that burned within me then and they still apply to my life.

Focus on Life

Shreds of memories swirl in my head:

Dreams of endings and beginnings,
disappointments and hopes,
farewells and greetings,
deadlines and decisions.

Some of my dreams got buried; some still grow and flourish:

Still I continue to gaze,
to hope,
to appreciate,
to explore the delicate lines of my life
journey.

Once distractions have vanished,
I discover a vibrant, thriving spirit
tenderly cradling other people's
pains and joys
mingled with mine
forming a living mandalla,
with Emmanuel at the core.

All this brings me to the words of our

Bicentenary Prayer:

Renew within us the same Passion of our founder, John Lambertz, that we may be aglow with his spirit and joyful witnesses of your love and Compassion among the people whose lives we touch daily. Amen

Sr. Jane Quinlan

Overcoming Obstacles: Ursuline Foundations in England

One of the characteristics of John Lambertz was missionary zeal to spread the Word of God. He was a man with a mission and this was evident by the 40 houses he founded before his death. All his efforts were guided by prayer stemming from confidence and trust in Jesus. He lived in the presence of God. As he founded one convent after another he managed to keep ties with each one.

The story of the foundation of Ursuline convents in England is an example of how Father John Lambertz exemplified his burning desire to make God better known and loved.

Around 1850, the Catholic Church in England, once oppressed, regained its civil rights, and many Protestants were entering the Catholic Church during the Oxford Movement.

Priests and religious went to England to be part of this restoration of the Catholic Church. Teaching sisters were especially sought out to bring people back to the church and to set up schools for catechetical instruction.

Father Kyne, an Irish curate in London, heard of the self-sacrifice of the Ursulines who had gone from Tildonk to Holland to educate young girls. He invited them to start a school in England. The first four Sisters who were sent to England were from Sittard in Holland.

Once in London, the Sisters established themselves in the center of a populated neighborhood, inhabited in part by Irish immigrants who were part of a vast immigration of Irish laborers who came there to make a living.

The Irish immigrants were forced to send their children to Protestant schools or else they would be deprived of schooling all together.

In a short time the Sisters had 200 children enrolled in the new school. "Many of them, even though they are 12-14 years old don't know how to make the sign of the cross," said the Reverend Mother Crescence. As far as tuition payments, only about 40 families could afford to pay. Besides running the small Catholic school, the Sisters were actively engaged in instructing adult women for the sacraments as well as instilling sound family values.

The Curé visited the Sisters in London in 1855. Later he wrote, "Each day I am with you in spirit." He sent them parcels regularly, with spice cakes, religious articles to sell and items for the chapel. This brought reassurance to the Sisters whose living conditions were poor.

A new foundation (1856) was established in the university city of Oxford, where of the 70,000 inhabitants, only 200 were Catholics. The first Mass celebrated in Oxford since the Protestant Reformation was in the chapel of the Ursuline convent. An Anglican Sister converted and joined the Ursulines when she saw serenity and joy on their faces.

In 1861, after several years of hardship and stress, the Ursulines handed the school in London over to Irish Sisters. The small community founded in London returned to Belgium and they were welcomed by the community of Saventhem.

At the time of leaving London, Cardinal Wiseman, the first archbishop of Westminster, gave them a picture with the words: "So far you have sown. You will return to reap. Without tears, no joy." Cardinal Wiseman devoted his life to the Roman Catholic revival in England and was eager to have the Sisters return. Wiseman was widely respected for his intellect, humanitarianism, and constructive achievements.

Ten months later they returned and were established in Upton in Essex in 1862.

The Cure decided to continue setting up new foundations in England. As a result other foundations flourished in England: Wimbledon was founded by Upton in 1892, followed by Brentwood in 1900.

May Day Celebration in India

May Day was celebrated on the 7th of May at St. Thomas Church Hall in Calcutta. It was organized by the Ministry of Domestic Workers, Seva Kendra Calcutta. 96 participants attended.

Three stories were shared during the day through the homily and videos; each gave us food for thought. The first is a story of a priest who was sent far in the village after his ordination. He wanted to live in the village setup like any other villager. He kept 12 sheep with him and he kept the name of all the 12 sheep. Whenever he called them by name the sheep came running to him. They knew him and recognized his voice. The Archbishop's stick symbolizes Jesus pasturing his sheep with a bent stick used to bring the sheep near him. A shepherd brings the branches close to the sheep with his bent stick because the branches are too high for the sheep to reach.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd. Jesus knows each one of us by name and calls us by name. He loves us and He leads us to green

pastures, just as our local leaders lead us with great love and care.

The second story is about of an old mother who waits for her son to come and take her to him. The son is a big business man and never talks to her because he is always busy. Nevertheless she has confidence in him that he would take care of her one day. Very eagerly she would call and want to talk to him but she failed to reach him.

Up to the last moment she couldn't inform him that she was seriously ill. Ultimately she died without her taking a picture of her son. What is the use of being highly educated and becoming a big business man if one cannot take care of his beloved mother who sacrificed her whole life for her son?

This is the reality of what is happening with the parents and young in the family as well as in society at large. They are busy with themselves with mobiles, etc.

The third story is about a cow and a young goat that started fighting. The cow thought little goat is so small she cannot fight with me and win. I am strong. Little goat never got discouraged, never gave up and did not think of her small size. She was confident and certain of being stronger than the cow. She continued fighting and was successful.

The lesson is to have confidence in oneself and think positively saying, "I can do and I will win." Very often we think that I cannot do this or that. It is not my business. I am small and uneducated. I am very poor. From today onwards say to yourself, "I can do it and I will win, and I'll never give up." Instead have courage to face big challenges.

Sr. Esther P. Kerketta