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**“There is need of only one thing.” (Lk 10:42)**

Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem, where his mission will be fulfilled. On the journey, he stops in a village at the home of Martha and Mary.

The evangelist Luke describes how the two sisters welcome Jesus: Martha fulfills the traditional role of homemaker and is “distracted by her many tasks” as she provides hospitality (although the verb *perispàomai* can also mean to be entirely occupied or greatly overburdened). Mary, instead, “sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to what he was saying.”

Mary’s attentiveness is countered by Martha’s agitation. Responding to her complaints about being left alone to serve, Jesus replies, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

This passage is situated between the parable of the Good Samaritan, arguably one of the greatest descriptions of love of neighbor, and the passage on how Jesus taught the disciples to pray, which is certainly the greatest explanation of the relationship with God the Father. Thus, this is a pivotal point on the scales, balancing our love for neighbor and love for God.

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The main characters in this Gospel passage are the two women. The dialogue that takes place between Jesus and Martha shows the friendship that allows her to complain to the master.

But what is the service that Jesus would like? For him it is important that Martha should not worry, that she should set aside the traditional tasks assigned to women and that she too should listen to his word, like Mary, who is taking on a new role as a disciple.

The message of this text has often been reduced to contrasting active and contemplative life, almost as if they were two alternative religious approaches. Yet both Martha and Mary love Jesus and want to serve him.

In the Gospel, in fact, it is not said that prayer and listening to the Word are more important than charity, but rather that we need to find a way to link these two loves in a lasting way. The two loves—love of God and love of neighbor—are not opposed to each other, but are complementary because love is one.

**“There is need of only one thing.”**

How do we understand what the one thing is that is needed? The beginning of the sentence can help us do this: “Martha, Martha...” In repeating her name, which can almost be seen as a rebuke, there is really a personal calling, a vocation. It seems that Jesus is calling Martha to a new way of relating to him, weaving a bond with him not as a servant, but as a friend who is entering into a profound relationship with him.

*“Jesus used these circumstances to explain what is most necessary in human life:... to listen to the Word of Jesus,”* wrote Chiara Lubich in July 1980. *“For Luke, who writes this passage, listening to the Word also means living it...”*

*“This is what you have to do too: welcome the Word and let it bring about a transformation in you. But that is not enough; you should remain faithful to it and hold it in your heart so that it shapes your life, just as the earth holds seeds within so that they may sprout and bear fruit. Therefore, bear the fruits of new life, the effects of the Word.”*

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Who knows how many opportunities we have to welcome the master into the intimacy of our home, just like Martha and Mary, and sit listening at his feet like true disciples? Often our worries, illnesses, commitments, and even joys and satisfactions draw us into a whirlwind of things to do, leaving us no time to stop and recognize the Lord and listen to him.

This Word is a precious opportunity to practice choosing the better part, which is, listening to his Word and acquiring that inner freedom that enables us to act accordingly in our daily lives. It can help us to carry out actions that are the fruit of a loving relationship that gives meaning to service and listening.

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