

Homily 16th Ordinary Time 2022

Do you ever get 'the wrong end of the stick?'. I love that radio ad for Specsavers hearing aids when the guy arrives home with food for 200 people to which the wife in astonishment says, 'I said food for TWO HUNGRY PEOPLE!'

The importance of hospitality is emphasised in today's First Reading as Abraham welcomes 3 strangers to his tent and, typical of us men, gets Sarah his wife to attend hand and foot to their needs. This servant attitude is underlined in St Paul's Letter to The Collosians, our Second Reading, when Paul calls himself 'a servant' of The Good News of Christ. So, it appears that ACTION in terms of Welcome and Service are of upmost importance in Sacred Scripture.

Yet, in Today's Gospel Jesus appears to demote ACTION and promote CONTEMPLATION. In Luke's story of Martha and Mary, Martha is all ACTION running around like a headless chicken, waiting on Jesus and attending to his every need. Mary, her sister, instead sits at the feet of Jesus and to all intents and purposes is looked down on as 'lazy'. Martha is not shy or slow in letting her know the score. Jesus turns to Martha and appears to rebuke her, 'Martha, Martha you are concerned about so many things and yet few are needed. Mary has taken the better part!' Have we got the wrong end of the stick when we put all our eggs in the basket of Christian Action or have we got the wrong end of the stick when we put all our eggs in the basket of a life of prayer and contemplation?

I have some very close friends who are religious sisters, nuns. Ester and Agnese two Italian Missionarie Di Maria extol the virtues of ACTIVE religious life in the field of the mission fields whilst Sisters Michaela and Stella, two Bernardine Cistercians, extol the virtues of an enclosed contemplative life of prayer within walls of the monastery. The truth is that none of these sisters/nuns could exist in religious life without both contemplative prayer and action. Ester and Agnese find their purpose and their drive to evangelise in contemplation and prayer whilst contemplation and prayer drive Stella and Michaela into evangelical action.

It must be said however, when we reflect on Jesus' words in The Gospel. Action without prayer is in grave danger of becoming mere humanitarian or social work but in the context of prayer and contemplation our actions become the actions of Christ our feet become his feet, our hands his hands and our hearts his heart. With prayer at its root our actions ensure that Christ is continually present in our broken world healing the sick, binding up wounds, giving hope to the broken-hearted, freedom to the imprisoned and Good News to the poor.