

Homily

16 Sunday (C)

17 July 2016

What is contemplative prayer? And any way what has it got to do with us? Isn't that what monks and nuns do, safely confined to their monasteries and convents? And what was it that Mary, the sister of Martha was doing as she *sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him*? What exactly does this sitting down and listening amount to? Jesus is quite clear about it. "*It is Mary who has chosen the better part.*"

So, does that mean that we Christians in the world are like Martha worrying and fretting about many things while for holy people in monasteries and convents are like Mary entering the innermost depths of contemplation and mysticism? The answer I believe is a resounding 'No'.

A balanced, happy life must, I believe, integrate both the Martha and the Mary. There are always jobs that need doing, food to be prepared, a living to be earned, people to look after. But to stop all those things getting on top of us, we need something deeper and more profound. We need, in short, to sit at the Lord's feet and listen to what he says.

This is what our discipleship group is trying to do on Thursday evenings - to sit together with the Lord, to listen to his word in Holy Scripture, to ponder together what this word is saying to us and then, in the strength of this word, to enter into contemplative silence.

Not that any of this is easy or straightforward. Praying, being part of a group, entering into silence, is always a bit risky. In fact, to describe it as risky is an understatement. St Paul, in our second reading, describes it as entering into suffering *in my own body to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church*. This is contemplative prayer, to share the suffering of the whole world, to be with Jesus and to play our own very small part in His work of salvation.

Abraham and Sarah, in providing hospitality for three strangers, found that they had been entertaining angels unawares. Christian scholars have seen in these three figures, not just three angels but a foretaste of the Most Holy Trinity. To share food and drink, to find our true home, to be united in the Most Holy Trinity **is** contemplative prayer. Don't leave it to the monks and nuns. Don't be *distracted with all the serving*, choose *the better part and live in the presence of the Lord*.

Fr Michael