

Proactive prayer and contemplative listening

From the Memorial Mass of Saint Martha

Read:

John 11:19-27

Luke 10:38-42

The sisters Martha and Mary had two different ways of seeking help from Jesus. Martha was proactive: She told Jesus exactly what she wanted from him, which bad situation needed to be corrected and who should be healed. And Mary was contemplative: She quietly listened.

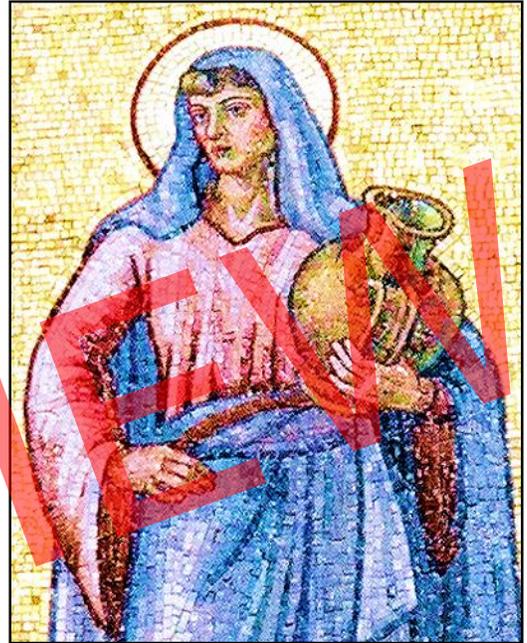
In John 11:19-27, Jesus arrives after Lazarus has died. Martha hurries out to Jesus to tell him in no uncertain terms that her brother's life could have been spared if only he had come sooner. Mary, however, stays home.

In Luke 10:38-42, Martha is being a good hostess. She takes care of everyone as a kindness, a gift for Jesus, while Mary sits at his feet to learn from him. Martha the doer tells him that she needs help and Mary isn't doing her fair share.

Speaking to God about injustices, telling him our needs, and asking for his help is right and good. But when the asking comes with the implication that God doesn't already understand the situation, we're being anxious like Martha. When we think God is late, we're not trusting him. When we pray repeatedly and persistently in an ongoing state of worry, it's time to sit still and listen, like the quiet Mary.

Notice what Martha did after she made her demands. She, too, listened. And then she realized that Jesus understood much more of the situation than she ever could.

During the intercessory prayers of Mass when we say, "Lord hear our prayer" or "Hear us, O Lord," I feel like I'm telling God to listen, as if he wasn't already. In truth, he's trying to get *me* to listen. He never stops listening and caring. He knows our



needs long before we begin to ask. We need to remember that "Lord hear our prayer" really means "Lord, receive this gift of prayer. Thank you for hearing us. Help us to hear your reply."

Anxiety and worry lead to: "God isn't convinced yet, so I have to keep begging, and if he doesn't act fast enough, too late, Lazarus died." Look at the confidence Jesus tried to instill in Martha when he arrived four days late. Look at the loving way he handled her anxiety and see him treating you the same way.

God is never late! His timing is always perfect. His answers to our prayers are always exactly when and what is best and most loving. To calm down and rest in this truth, we have to sit still and listen in quiet awareness of God's goodness.

Hush.... Sit still.... Listen.... He's here!