

## 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year (Luke)

Jesus and his disciples continue their journey to Jerusalem. Along the way we have already met various groups of people: the crowds drawn by their own needs and astonished by what he does; the religious leaders who are growing more hostile; the disciples, enthusiastic but still confused by Jesus' talk of his own passion. Just before today's passage, in last Sunday's gospel, a lawyer tested Jesus by asking who is my neighbour, to which Jesus responded with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The question remains, have the people been listening to Jesus, have we? Today's gospel gives us an example of someone who does.

In the Gospel we have a story of hospitality, this time Jesus welcomed into her house by Martha. Her sister, Mary, sat down at Jesus' feet and listened to him while Martha prepared the meal. Whenever this short story has been discussed sides are taken and, in truth, many support Martha's request to Jesus to tell her sister to help with the meal. So the story becomes one where one sister is set against another, with Jesus apparently criticising Martha for worrying and fretting about many things and siding with Mary who has chosen the better part. But, surely it can't be as simple as that, so perhaps we need to put this passage into context.

As I mentioned a moment ago, last Sunday's gospel passage was that of The Good Samaritan, which ended with Jesus telling the lawyer to go and do what the Samaritan had done to the man who was left half dead. So action, particularly going to the help of the needy, the corporal works of mercy are very much part of our lives as disciples of Jesus. Immediately after the story of the Good Samaritan we have this passage about Jesus visiting the home of Martha and Mary, and here Jesus is pushing boundaries again. There is no mention of Lazarus, so Jesus was being entertained by two sisters, no problem to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but absolutely taboo at the time of Jesus, so another example of Jesus pushing boundaries. Furthermore Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. Traditionally this was the place of a disciple, and most people thought of disciples in terms of men. Jesus treats Mary as a disciple, and the first responsibility of a disciple is to listen, so as to learn, so as to imitate.

This week's passage ends with the words, Mary has chosen the better part; it is not to be taken from her, and next Sunday's Gospel is Jesus responding to the disciples' request to teach them how to pray, to which he gives them the Our Father. So the better part involves prayer, and prayer involves listening to the word of God, and the word of God leads us into action. In preparing for today I read the following: "The Christian life involves, among other things, a sense of timing" We gain nothing by pitting Martha against Mary, by claiming the contemplative way of life is better than the active. We gain everything by recognising that discipleship involves listening, prayer and action and in our own personal prayer might well to ask for the wisdom to know where and when each fits into our own lives.

## Bidding Prayers for the 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday

Celebrant:

The Just will live in the presence of the Lord. With these reassuring words of the psalmist in our minds and hearts we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

For the Church – that the Church will help us all to find a true balance in our lives so that all our actions will be underpinned by frequent prayer.

Lord in your mercy

For our political and civic leaders – that in these times of unrest and uncertainty, they will do all they can to resolve the tensions and animosity that divide people today.

Lord in your mercy

For all those suffering in body, mind or spirit – that they will experience the healing presence of Christ and the love and support of family and friends.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died especially all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the Covid 19 pandemic, for Fr Bernard Funnell, a retired priest of the diocese who died recently, and Brian Knox, Margaret Booth, Josephine Uttley, Josef Flashca, Joan Anderton, Norah Buckley, and Lydia Gartside, whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Be gracious, Lord, to those who serve you, and in your kindness increase your gifts of grace within us, so that fervent in faith, hope and love we may be ever on the watch and persevere in doing what you command. Through Christ our Lord. Amen