

16th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Luke 10:38-42

The Church, as is each person, can be said to be made of two things: body and soul. The soul animates the body and the body gives expression to the soul. Body and soul cannot be separated without a longing for reunion, for that which affects the soul is made known in and through the body, and that which affects the body is known in the soul. That is why nothing can be said to be purely physical.

Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus whom our Lord raised from the dead, are images of the body and soul of the Church. Martha, who busies herself with the practicalities of hospitality is the body, and Mary, who sits at the Lord's feet to listen to Him is the soul. The soul's yearning to be with God who created it is expressed in the service of God enfleshed. That is, as Mary cannot draw herself away from being with the Lord, Martha gives expression to that love by serving the Lord.

That body and soul of the Church is expressed today in the active and the contemplative life. There are men and women who as nuns and monks and deacons and priests serve God and the Church actively by ministering the Sacraments, in evangelisation, in schools, in hospitals, and there are men and women who as nuns and monks and deacons and priests who serve God and the Church contemplatively by their prayers and devotions cloistered in convents and monasteries. Those who serve God and the Church actively by their apostolate as parish priests, or hospital chaplains, or in other active ways give bodily expression to love for God and the love of God for His people. Those who serve God and the Church contemplatively by their apostolate of prayer and devotion, such as those who pray day and night before the Blessed Sacrament, give soulful expression to love for God and the love of God for His

people. Those who are contemplative are like the engine room of the ship of the Church. Those who are active are the hull and decks of the ship of the Church.

When Martha, the body, complains to the Lord that Mary, the soul, is doing none of the work, the Lord says that it is Mary, the soul, that has chosen the greater part. For without the soul the body is a corpse. It is the soul that gives life to the body and causes it to move and to act. Mary is an image of the soul for she sits at the feet of Christ and listens to Him and so she comes to have a taste of Heaven where the soul, by the mercy of God and having been purified on earth or in purgatory, sits forever with God beholding His glory.

While Mary chose the greater part, the service given by Martha remains necessary for we are physical creatures and our bodily needs must be met. We must be fed and clothed and sheltered and educated. But the way in which we attend to ourselves and to others is informed or guided by the soul.

There is a debate now taking place concerning ethics classes in schools. There are some who argue that modern society must free itself from the Christian model of ethics and form a new model of secular ethics. That is, the body of society must be guided by a new soul of society, and that this soul must be free of the influence of Christianity. But then what model is used? Do ethics become simply a matter of a majority vote or the prevailing law so that what is immoral this year may be perfectly moral next year? Where then is our foundation? What is our guide? There would be nothing stable, there would be nothing that could be said to be true. Instead truth becomes a matter of popular opinion.

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the great model of the Church. In her life she made known both the active and the contemplative, and never so much as she did at the beginning and end of our Lord's life. In hearing the Word of God spoken by the Archangel Gabriel she conceived of God's Son and her Son and gave Him life. In standing at the foot of the Cross as God's Son and her Son hung dying she remained there with Him and listened to Him again so that she

became the mother of St. John and so the Mother of the Church.

For most of us whose vocation is more active than contemplative Christ becomes the anchor of our life. It is our foundation, our mooring, the unchanging horizon of our life. We come to the Mass like the ocean tides; we ebb and flow, back and forth, to the Mass and from the Mass. It is our source and our summit. It is the place we arrive for our souls to be recharged and the place we depart to bodily love and serve the Lord.