

On Martha and Mary

"We Are Reminded of the Need to Rest From Our Daily Labors"

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy, JULY 18, 2010 (Zenit).- Here is a translation of the address Benedict XVI gave today before praying the midday Angelus together with those gathered in the courtyard of the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters!

We are already in the heart of the summer, at least in the northern hemisphere. This is the time in which the schools are closed and in which most vacations are concentrated. Even the pastoral activities of the parishes are reduced, and I myself have suspended audiences for a period. It is therefore a favorable moment to give first place to what is effectively the most important thing in life, that is to say, listening to the Word of God. This Sunday's Gospel always reminds us of this with the celebrated episode of Jesus' visit to the house of Martha and Mary narrated by St. Luke (10:38-42).

Martha and Mary are two sisters; they also have a brother, Lazarus, who, however, does not appear in this case. Jesus passes through their village and -- the text says -- Martha welcomes him (cf. 10:38). This detail gives one to understand that, of the two sisters, Martha is the oldest, the one who rules the house. In fact, after Jesus is accommodated, Mary sits at his feet and listens to him, while Martha is completely absorbed with much serving, which is certainly due to the exceptional guest. We seem to see the scene: One sister is very busy and the other is enraptured by the presence of the Master and his words. After a while Martha, evidently resentful, no longer resists and protests, also feeling that she has the right to criticize Jesus: "Lord, does it not matter to you that my sister has left me to do all the serving? Tell her, therefore, to help me." Indeed, Martha would like to teach the Master! But Jesus, with great calm, answers: "Martha, Martha" -- and this name repeated expresses affection -- "you are anxious and worried about many things, but there is only one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her" (Luke 10:41-42). Christ's word is quite clear: no scorn for the active life, nor much less for the generous hospitality; but a plain reminder of the

fact that the one thing that is truly necessary is something else: listening to the Word of the Lord; and the Lord is there in that moment, present in the person of Jesus! Everything else will pass and will be taken away from us, but the Word of God is eternal and gives meaning to our daily activity.

Dear Friends, as I said, this Gospel passage is very important at vacation time, because it recalls the fact that the human person must work, must involve himself in domestic and professional concerns, to be sure, but he has need of God before all else, who is the interior light of love and truth. Without love, even the most important activities lose value and do not bring joy. Without a profound meaning, everything we do is reduced to sterile and disordered activism. And who gives us love and truth if not Jesus Christ? So let us learn, brothers, to help each other, to cooperate, but first of all to choose together the better part, which is and will always be our greater good.

[Translation by Joseph G. Trabbic]

[After the Angelus the Holy Father greeted the faithful in various languages. In English he said:]

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking visitors here in Castel Gandolfo. In today's Gospel we are reminded of the need to rest from our daily labors, so that we may give time to the one thing that is truly necessary in our lives -- listening to the word of God in attentive stillness. It is Mary, not Martha, who chose the better part. At this time when many of you are on holiday, I pray that you and your loved ones may be truly refreshed in body and spirit, so that you may return with renewed vigor to the responsibilities of your daily lives. May God bless you all!