

A friend of mine says this Gospel story is the one place in the New Testament where Jesus makes a mistake. If you're a guest in someone's home and the hostess asks for help, it's time to quit gabbin' and start workin'. But when Jesus is in this situation at Martha's house, He sits on His divine duff and keeps talking with Mary. What is going on?

It's unthinkable that Jesus our Hero would be rude to His hostess or encourage laziness as a virtue. But He seems to miss the chance to provide a simple gesture of charity. It seems odd, but from Jesus' point of view, both women were offering hospitality--one by cleaning the house, the other by listening to Him speak. And I think even the most neurotic cleaner among us would have to admit that the chance to talk face to face with Jesus would beat dusting floorboards any old day.

The moral of the story seems to be, "There comes a time to drop the dishcloth and pick up a prayerbook. There comes a time to stop being Martha, who entertains by working, and start being Mary, who entertains by listening." But you know, it's not all that easy. Whether your responsibility is taking care of the home, the office, the car, or the classroom, it's not easy to drop everything to play host to Jesus by listening to Him in prayer. Even when you come to church for this purpose--to listen to the Word of God--plans for the week may run through your head, children may run through your lap. It's not easy, even when we want to, to drop everything and listen to Christ in prayer. No one doubts it's a very good thing to do, it's just a hard thing to do if we are easily distracted by our responsibilities, even when they are worthwhile.

Perhaps this is why Jesus seems to miss an obvious opportunity for charity--He calls disciples beyond responsibility and into prayer.

To drop everything might be asking too much. To banish all distractions from our minds--well, that's definitely asking too much. When the Gospel encourages us to listen to Jesus, it's not asking us to add another burden on an already overloaded schedule. It's asking us to get in touch, to see the value of what we do, to find the center of our being, to meet Christ, Who makes us whole.

People find Christ in ordinary ways--they jog, they stroll, they rest, they ride a bus, they take a bath, they reflect. I know people who actually enjoy doing the dishes, mowing the lawn, or even taking out the garbage just for a moment of solitude. These are otherwise quite normal human beings. But they know they need a moment to get in touch, they need a moment every day at the park, in the tub, at the garbage heap, to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen.

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