

Sixteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

This One Thing

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Jesus tells us in this Gospel passage that there is ONE needed thing!

If Jesus Christ truly is the one Lord, the one Savior, the one Way, Truth, and Life (which he is), then it is certain that "only one" thing is needed for a fulfilling, meaningful, and fruitful life: and that is to stay as close to Christ as possible at all times.

This Gospel message tells us that, what is much more important than what we can DO for Christ is what we can BE for him, and what he can BE for us.

In this Gospel reading we see Martha doing all kinds of tasks, and that was good. We are called to "do good things". That's what we do as Faithful followers of Christ.

But Mary wasn't "doing" anything at this time, other than sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to him! Being his close and intimate friend; and that, Jesus says, was even better, than doing. Mary was doing "the better part".

Friendship with Christ is the one thing needed! That is what Jesus is speaking of.

Our task here on earth is to make a conscious choice and to shape our lives accordingly, to keep Christ first in our lives.

Jesus doesn't congratulate Mary because she was more holy than her sister.

He praises her because she has "chosen the better part."

She chooses it. God gives us the freedom to choose!

God gives us the freedom to choose! Mary chooses to submit to the Lord, to let him be for her what he truly is

for everyone - the “one needed thing”. Martha, on the other hand, had a divided heart.

She loves Christ, but she still feels the need to earn his love; rather than sitting with Jesus listening to his words. She was not working on her relationship with Jesus. Time spent with Jesus is so precious!

Martha hasn't learned that what matters is not so much what WE can do for Christ as what he has already done for us

Jesus gently teaches her in this encounter that the greatest thing she can do for him, the "one needed thing", is to let him rule completely over her heart, to take her place at his feet and listen to his words.

One of the most famous martyrs in the history of the Church gave memorable testimony to this truth. His name was St Polycarp. Actually, he is my “patron Saint”. He was the bishop of Smyrna, which is in modern day Turkey. He was born about the year 69AD and died around 155AD. Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John and it was said he was ordained by the beloved Apostle.

During one of the many waves of persecution that rocked the first centuries of Christianity, Polycarp was arrested and brought to trial before the local governor.

He was already an old man, but still an active and revered bishop. He was loved by all the people.

The Roman authorities at the time persecuted the Christians not because they committed crimes, but because they refused to worship the Roman gods; but instead they worshipped this man Jesus!

St Polycarp answered the governor:

"I have served Christ these fourscore and six years, and he never did me any harm, but rather, so much good. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?

...Hear my free confession: I am a Christian. I choose to worship Jesus!"

As a result of this profession of faith, St Polycarp was sentenced to public execution by being burned alive at the stake.

Legend has it that: The flames failed to harm him.

Eye witnesses say that the flames rose to a great height, surrounding him like a transparent circular wall in the middle of the stadium.

He seemed to glow with a golden light, but he remained unharmed. Maybe he was filled with the “Light of Christ”!

Since the fire failed to kill him, the guards had to kill him with the thrust of a spear; this 86-year-old man of God!

St Polycarp's answer to the governor shows that he knew all about "the better part". He knew that he must suffer in this life to ensure his relationship with Jesus was strong and everlasting!

For him, Christ was a faithful friend who had never abandoned him in his 86 years of life

That friendship was what gave his life meaning, so much so that he refused to give it up even in the face of an ugly, painful martyrdom.

Keeping Christ first, keeping friendship with Jesus as our highest priority and his will as our greatest desire – that is "the better part". After sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to his words, now we must go out and live them. But it is not always easy to do. It requires self-sacrifice!

After sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to his words, now we must go out and live them.

This means living by his standards; not our standards and not those of the world around us

It means being honest, even if it appears everybody else is dishonest!

It means being moral, even if it appears everybody else is being immoral!

It means speaking well of others, even if others are gossiping and criticizing others.

It means governing our desires for pleasure, when everyone around us is just giving in to sin!

It means staying faithful to our duties and relationships, always giving our best at home, at school, and at work, even when we get tired, even when no one notices.

It means offering our lives as “a living sacrifice to the Lord!”

But above all, it means doing all things because we love Christ and want to follow him, at all costs!

It is the grace of his friendship that strengthens us to follow his instructions in the Gospel.

And it is the grace of that friendship that makes following those instructions worthwhile.

And it is the grace of that friendship that will fill our hearts with the wisdom and joy that, as Jesus promised Mary, "will not be taken from us".

During this Mass, Christ has something to say to each one of us. That's why he comes to us individually in Holy Communion. Like Mary, we must choose the better part and listen carefully to the words of Jesus!

Let's promise him that we will live accordingly during the coming week, having confidence not in our own strength, as Martha did, but in the power of God's grace at work within us.