

Martha, Martha – sermon, July 18th

Years ago I used to play football – now I mean football, not soccer.

12 people per team on offense and 12 on defence – each with their own task
One a quarterback, 5 pass receivers, 5 linemen, and one ball carrier – easy to understand – eh?

With each position would come certain responsibilities – blocking, running, catching, throwing, kicking – each person understood their job and how they, as a team had to work together to win.

If you talked to any football player, in fact if you talked to any athlete in any sport, they would tell you the same thing – to become good, you have to practice.
Practice makes perfect.

So for a football player, the quarterback would practice throwing the ball, 1,000s of times. The receiver would practice running their routes and catching. The kickers would practice punting and kicking. They would do this day in and day out – while also making plans to play their next opponent.

To the outsider, and perhaps even to many watching the game, not much would make sense – until you played the game – then you would be so glad for the repetitive practices of throwing, of catching, of kicking, of blocking, of tackling.

But then again, this is true for any craft – the piano player or organist practices hours and hours during the week. The teacher prepares their lesson before getting in front of their class; the janitor insures that they have all the supplies necessary to do a good job – we all practice – and practice allows us to enjoy, and not fret while undertaking whatever be our game.

One of my times for relaxation is in cooking – oh yes, I do the barbequing, but I am talking cooking.

My speciality, if I can call it that, is lasagne and spaghetti and meat sauce.

Now, if you ever get to taste my pastas, you will soon learn that I am not afraid of garlic. In fact Wendy would often say, oh don't cook that before church – maybe not everyone will like the garlic like you do.

If asked to give you my recipe for either, I could tell you it is some of this and some more of that – but, exactly how much – well – I just don't know.

One thing I have begun to learn, if I am cooking while upset or distracted – well, my food tastes like I may have forgotten something or other. However, if I become the singing Italian chef, at least in my mind, wow – now that is a good meal!

Listen to that, nothing worse than a chef bragging about his food!

But isn't it true – food tastes better when we are happy – and especially when the cook is happy. Now there is a lesson in that statement, but I will allow you each to figure that one out.

Now I am sure that you have been around angry cooks – I have. I may even have been the person who got the cook angry once in a while – no, seriously – it has happened.

You can tell. Cupboard doors are slammed. No talking takes place. Pots are put down harder on the counter than usual – and when that happens, you know, you just know, you have an angry cook.

This is what happened with Martha as found in today's Gospel lesson.

Lord, aren't you concerned that this sister of mine has left me to do all the work here in the kitchen?

When you hear it, especially if you separate it away from the rest of the story, it almost sounds as if she is wanting to give Jesus heck – to give him a piece of her mind. It is almost as if she is saying, don't you know how hard it is to cook this meal – I'm hot, I'm tired, and people keep coming.

And then to punctuate her thoughts, you hear the pot plunked down on the counter or the cupboard doors slam.

One could easily think – don't make the cook mad – especially if you want to eat.

But Jesus has a way of helping everyone see the bigger picture. Like Martha, many, if not most of us can narrow our thought processes – always thinking that our way is the best.

Remember those who followed Jesus after He fed the 5,000 men. The ones who wanted to make Him King. They followed Him, not because of his speeches, but because he had fed them with the bread. They likened Jesus to Moses with the Manna – and Jesus knew that. It was to this crowd that Jesus said, **“People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”**

In other words, there is more to life than getting the meal out on time.

There is more to life than making sure that everyone understands your point of view.

There is more to life than trying to prove yourself – or prove that you are right.

There is more to life than trying to please a guest...no matter who the guest is.

Our brothers and sisters in many parts of the southern world have never forgotten this message – but, many of us in the northern world have.

I believe the point that Jesus attempts to make to Martha and to Mary is that Jesus desires that we each be His guests. We enjoy His presence. That we soak up his words. We are soothed by his love of each of us.

It sounds great! But as Martha, or anyone organizing any sort of function could tell you, it's not easy.

Thursday our parish was feeding the construction workers at the build site of Habitat for Humanity. But the workers didn't work that day – it was too wet – too dangerous.

I dreaded telling the volunteers, some of whom had been at the church for a few hours already that the meal is not today. To tell you the truth, I was more the Martha – the ladies and Roger were the Mary's of the church.

It is so easy to be controlled by our own expectations of ourselves. We can sometimes be our harshest critic.

It's not easy to ignore the pressures of a boss, a coach, a spouse, a professor, a teacher – because they will all be there. It is not easy ignoring the pressures of a debt, getting a job, preparing for retirement – because these concerns can too easily dominate.

And once a concern dominates, all other focuses get pushed out.

Jesus said, “Man and Woman **cannot live by bread alone – but by every word that comes from God.**”

This is the food we need in order to be healthy, holistic, balanced. It is why you are in church today.

Here, in God’s house, in his living room we gather. While together, the pressure to succeed is put aside, the pressures of work are forgotten, and the need to be controlled by the clock relegated to the past.

It’s the Lord’s Day. It is time to worship. It is time to rest.

It will be Christ himself that will bid you to come to His table, to dine with him.

It is funny, once we are with our Lord, we indeed view life just a bit differently – after all, we are in His presence, basking in His love, knowing just how precious we are to our Lord.

Amen.