Today we read another familiar story of Mary and Martha. When Jesus arrived to the home of his closest friends – Mary and Martha, and presumably Lazarus as well. Upon his arrival, Martha found herself working in a frenzy in and out of the kitchen, preparing for the meal and setting up the room where their honored guests will stay, while Mary, on the other hand was just sitting, chilling, and having conversation with Jesus. So Martha came over to Jesus and started her rants about her little sister for not doing her share of the chores around the house in providing hospitality and welcome to their guest. “*Can you please tell Mary to come over and help me, instead of just sitting around?”* But Jesus responded to her, saying *“Martha, Martha, you worried too much and are constantly distracted by many things. There is only one thing that you need, and Mary has chosen that better thing!”*

So what is this “one thing” that Jesus was referring to? Is it not proper that we fulfill our duties in order to serve God and to serve others? Well, Yes, it is! But is that ALL? Is that ALL that we need to focus ourselves with, at the expense of compromising our “quality time” with God? Of course not. **What Mary had chosen was the “better thing”, but NOT the only thing.** She prioritized by spending “quality time” with God, instead of getting herself all busy and caught up with the “other things” that might distract her from her relationships with God, and with others.

Often times we find ourselves getting caught in this Mary-Martha syndrome in our lives, both individually or corporately as a community of faith. Often times we may find ourselves being Martha – busily doing things, planning for the next events, activities or outings, even if they are church related, while neglecting to embrace God’s presence among us. We’ve failed to take “time-out” to honor God and to entertain what God has to say among us. So we took it upon ourselves. We went ahead and did it anyway.

I think there are times when we need to be **Martha**, that is we need to get things done in a timely, efficient, and responsible manner, and there are times when we need to be **Mary**, that is we need to surrender ourselves at the Lord’s feet, let things play themselves out, while seeking our intimacy and relationship with God first and foremost… actively listening to what God has to say to us, honoring what God wants instead of what we desire. However, **being “Martha” and being “Mary” are NOT mutually exclusive of one another. The key is that we need to discover our own proper balance between the two poles of the extemes.**

**Be available, and be ready for actions**, **when prompted by the Holy Spirit through our obedience and discipline.** God has made available to us, all of the necessary tools and resources that we need, including our personal characteristics, gifts, and skills in order to conduct God’s ministry. So we ought to use them accordingly and wisely by choosing the better thing.

Martha believed that she was simply serving Jesus by keeping herself busy and for being a gracious host in providing hospitality to her guest…through her hands-on service. That’s how she expresses her love for Jesus and for others. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that. Everyone is gifted in different way.

On the other hand, Mary chose to spend some quality time with her out-of-town guest, patiently listening and communicating with Jesus. Jesus commended Mary’s attentiveness to his teaching and rebuked Martha for her busyness in getting herself all caught up with many things, which became a form of “distraction” and “worry” for Martha.[[1]](#footnote-1) Personally, I tend to give Martha the benefit of the doubt, that perhaps this was her way of expressing her love for God. Martha took the practical approach in providing hospitality to her guest. We need a balance of both the “Martha” and the “Mary” sides in our lives.

Furthermore, and I don’t know if you notice, throughout this entire episode, it was Martha who did all of the talking so passionately to Jesus, while Mary kept her silence and her thoughts to herself. She didn’t even say a word in defending herself from her sister’s accusations. Sitting at the Lord’s feet should NOT be mistaken for the one and necessary thing[[2]](#footnote-2) as our Lord requires of his disciples. We need a proper balance between the **hearing** and **proclaiming,** and **applying the Word of God** as well.

A couple of months ago I was introduced to someone who’s a relatively new Christian for maybe, let’s say, about 2-3 years. As a new Christian, she’s greatly enthusiastic and excited about her faith and her new relationship with God and with the people. Everything was going well in terms of her spiritual walk with God. She was making new friends socially at church, involving in many aspects of ministry through her volunteer and services. She was serving on the worship team, involved with ushering, greeting visitors and newcomers, helping out in translating if needed to. She’s actively involved with her young adult fellowship, Women’s Bible Study, and even volunteered to teach English to ESL children. But lately she expressed to me that she felt a sense of loneliness, isolation and distance from God. *“God is not as close to her heart as it was before. Is there something wrong with me?”* She asked. Her relationship with God is not as intimate as it used to be and she doesn’t know what was happening. She seems to be losing her sense of “joy” in serving and losing her strides in her walk with God.

As she was telling me her story, my immediate response was that she seemed to be doing “too much” and not spending enough time for personal “self-care” or quality time with God. She needs to slow down and listen to God more attentively. She admitted that one of her weaknesses is that she doesn’t know how to say “NO” to people. When others asked her to do somethings, she would always say “YES”. Sometimes that can be dangerous! She thinks that by doing more and getting herself involved with all kinds of ministry related activities, her faith would grow and she would be drawing closer to God. But unfortunately, that was not the case to be. In fact, it has had an adverse impact on her spiritual walk, compromising her personal relationships with God, as well as that of her friends and families.

In short, I advise this sister that she needed to take some “time out” and to take something off the plate, otherwise she would get spiritually burnt out very easily. She needed to hit the “pause” button and re-assess her spiritual priorities. I invited her to pray sincerely and to discern the wisdom of the Spirit of what she must decides to choose. She needed to choose the better thing for herself. ***Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all the other things will be given to you as well![[3]](#footnote-3)***It is my prayer and I have confident in this sister that she may rediscover her true JOY in serving and rekindling her passion and her love with God once again.

Like Mary, at times we may find ourselves positioned at the foot of Jesus, listening and praying for the Word of God to be made relevant and prompted us into actions. At times we might be like Martha, by positioning ourselves at the door, standing ready to be sent out as God’s ambassadors in this world. **Neither Martha or Mary were wrong for doing what they did.** Instead of condemning for what the other did or didn’t do, let us seek the best of both worlds. **Both Mary and Martha shall complement each other through their callings while exercising their unique God given gifts, skills and talents.**

Through our story today, Jesus implies that **there is a subtle distinction between the “hearing” and “doing” of the WORD**, **that we must honor and love God not only in Word and in Speech, but with Action and in Truth.** **Both our “hearing” and “doing” of the word are equally as important.** The body of Christ cannot be all “Mary” and not enough “Martha” and vice versa it cannot be all “doers” and not enough “hearers” as well. They must work alongside and complement one another, so that the ministry of God may flourish. As one theologian who commented on this text wrote, **“*just as Martha and Mary need each other, so the church needs diverse, interdependent members. Not everyone in the church has the same gifts or calling. Discipleship is nurtured in community, not within the individual alone.”[[4]](#footnote-4)***

This Martha-Mary syndrome offers us a “reality check” of where we stand in terms of our own spiritual priorities and how we share our gifts and talents, both individually or collectively with others. As Christ’s called disciples, our duties and obligations are to fulfill God’s mission and activities here on earth. We are God’s ambassadors, the hands and the feet, the voices and the pulses of this world. There is a mission field out there waiting for us to explore and to harvest, as we gauge the vitality and the felt needs of this world in a personal way.

In the other passage that we read earlier, the Apostle Paul also affirmed this message by reminding the early church in Colossae that we have been commissioned to be “servants” of the gospel through the gifts that are given to us, despite some of the adversities and challenges that we might face. We rejoice even in our suffering for the sake of his body, that is the church.[[5]](#footnote-5) **Our calling is not only to be the “Mary” in knowing God’s word ourselves, but to be the “Martha” in making God’s word fully known to others.**[[6]](#footnote-6) **Our focus is not what we must “do” here on earth, but what we must obediently “seek” after in the Kingdom of God.** God has chosen the best of us and prepared us to respond by choosing the “better thing” for the kingdom of God here on earth. We do so by fixing our eyes upon what is above.

**So therefore, whether you’re Mary or Martha/(Miguel or Marco), let us surrender ourselves to God through our faithful obedience, with one foot at the cross and another foot at the door, ready not only to listen to what God has to say but to speak out and to take actions. It is indeed a privilege and a gift for us to be the hearers and doers of God’s Word! Therefore, let us Go. Let us Go and Choose wisely and seek the better things from above.**

Thanks be to God.In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Luke 10:41* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Osorto Hierald E. *Connections, Year C, Volume 3 p.179* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Matthew 6:33* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Saunders, Stanley P. *Connections, Year C, Volume 3 p.177* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Colossians 1:24* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Colossians 1:25* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)