

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen

Over the last few months I have come to realize that I have a lot more in common with Martha than I realized, and conversely, I have less in common with Mary than I realized.

Our Reading gives us the condensed version of the story and leaves out a lot of details. It is reasonable to assume that Mary was helping Martha get the meal ready when Jesus and the disciples first arrived.

But at some point she was able to hear some of what Jesus was saying and decided that she needed to hear all of what He was saying. So she sat at his feet, leaving Martha to continue the preparations on her own.

I think we all can identify with Martha's frustration at having to do all the work by herself. In today's culture, it would seem appropriate for her to say, "Hey guys, can we pause for a moment, and all work together in getting this meal on the table; then we all can hear what Jesus has to say?"

That is not what she asked, and we can only speculate at how Jesus would have responded if she had made that request.

However, we do have Jesus' reply to her question: "Martha, Martha, ... there is need of only one thing." Instead of preparing a lavish meal which required a lot of preparation, Martha could have chosen a simple meal. She and Mary could easily have set that on the table as soon as Jesus and the disciples arrived, and they all could have listened to what Jesus had to say." Problem solved.

Martha instead chose to prepare a lavish meal, perhaps partly out of pride - wanting to show her guests that she is a good cook and a very good host. Pride may be partly involved in that choice, but so is the fact that the meal she prepares reflects how much she values her guests.

If she had chosen to prepare a simple meal. would that give her guests the impression that they are ordinary, everyday friends rather than special guests?

Martha's motivations are not the issue here. For whatever reason she chose to prepare a lavish meal which meant spending more time preparing and serving the meal and less time with her guests, specifically less time with Jesus.

That is where this Reading strikes me. This Reading causes me to ask, "Am I distracted by all the things that fill my hours and days, to the point that I don't take time to sit at Jesus' feet and hear what He wants to say to me?"

The answer is a very loud and clear "Yes." However, over the past several months I have come to realize that the issue is not time with God. I do spend time with God in the morning, after lunch, and after supper. The problem is that I am easily distracted by thoughts that pop into my head and demand my attention. So I can be physically spending time with God, but am mentally distracted by my thoughts, and am not actually focused on God or listening for what He wants to say to me.

I have also come to realize that I am not alone in having that problem. Virtually everyone has that problem. As soon as we choose to be alone with God, we are bombarded with thoughts that demand our attention.

Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." I have been aware of that verse, and others like it for many years. And I have attempted to do what it says. Sitting still is relatively easy; being still no so much.

I will start with when things changed: most of you know that my dear wife, Rosemarie, the love of my life, died suddenly and unexpectedly near the beginning of March. I will also say once again, "Thank you to so many of you who offered your condolences in words, in sympathy cards and phone calls. I greatly appreciate your support."

God, along with the support and love of family, church family and friends have enabled me to progress along my journey through grief.

Rose had open heart surgery in January for a partially blocked artery and A-fib. There was a 1% chance of death, and a 1% chance of having a stroke. Which left a 98% chance of a full recovery - very good odds.

The surgeon did not mention that there was any possibility that her heart could just stop beating in the middle of the night 6 weeks after her surgery. But that is what seems to have happened.

I did not expect that, and was not at all prepared. However, God knew that it was going to happen, and in hindsight I can see that He was helping me be prepared.

For several years He has been urging me to be focused on Him during the time that I was spending with Him. In fact, a little over a year ago, I was

here to lead a worship service and shared in a sermon how God had spoken to me on 2 mornings when I was awake at about 4.

On those 2 mornings God highlighted 2 separate events going all the way back to the time when I was about 18 and 20. And He told me that He had specific words that He wanted to say to me at those times. His words might have changed how I responded to those events, but I wasn't listening. And that was the point.

When I was 18, or 20 or even 30, I wasn't listening to God at all. During my 40s and into my 70s I was listening some of the time, but still not hearing all of what God wants to say to me.

When Rose died, I knew that I really needed God's guidance and direction, so I have been putting more effort into being still, listening for His words of wisdom and life. I even bought a book, "Invitation to Solitude and Silence" which is helping greatly.

One quote really struck me, "All of [humanity's] problems stem from [our] inability to sit alone in a room for any length of time." That was written by Blaise Pascal almost 400 years ago.

I had heard of Blaise Pascal but did not know that he was a French mathematician, physicist, inventor, philosopher, writer, and Catholic theologian. Some people can be known as one of those, but it is rare to have such a list of gifts and achievements.

I knew that I had a problem being alone and silent; I did not know that it is a universal problem. Be that as it may, the issue is that we all have difficulty taking time to sit alone at Jesus' feet, at God's feet, listening for what God wants to say to us.

The author of the book that I am reading puts it into perspective. She was in her 30s, a wife, mother of 3 young children, a writer, and taking some Seminary courses. She has been a Christian all of her life, and thought she should be able to handle all of this. But she was finding herself getting angry or frustrated with her children or her husband, or even members of the congregation when they needed her time and attention.

She knew that God promised to transform her to be more like Jesus, and to respond to these situations as Jesus would. But how exactly does that transformation happen? It wasn't happening in her.

I can relate to those questions and those situations. Out of desperation, the author went to a female psychologist, assuming that therapy would help. It did, to a point, but the therapist was also a spiritual director, and one day said, "Ruth, you are like a jar of river water, poured into a jar and shaken up. It is all cloudy. You need to sit still and let the water settle so that it becomes clear."

The therapist taught Ruth how to sit quietly, alone with God, listening for His soft words and gentle guidance. Over the years, she has learned to balance the busyness of everyday life with the silence and solitude of being alone with God.

She has also learned that each of us creates a false self - a person created by and projected outwardly by "self".

The Bible tells us that each of us is "fearfully and wonderfully made." That is our true self, the person God created us to be. As we take the time to sit alone with God, God chips away at that false self and replaces it with our true self, the person God created us to be, the person He wants each of us to see and know, and the person God wants the world to see and know.

In our Gospel Reading, Mary saw the value in sitting at Jesus' feet taking in every word he had to say. I am beginning to learn that same lesson.

This morning I urge all of you to hear this message. We all have been distracted by the busyness of everyday life and have failed to take the time to read our Bibles, and to sit quietly in God's presence listening for every word that He wants to say to us.

I urge you to push the distractions aside. Take at least 10 minutes to sit quietly, alone with God. Invite and allow Him to speak to you, guide you, transform you to be the person He created you to be. Amen