

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

The Better Part Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time/C July 17, 2016 **Gn 18:1-10a;**
Col 1:24-28; **Lk 10:38-42** (We can be too focused on our own needs, and not realize the
presence of the Lord and the gifts at hand.)

“Mary has chosen the better part.”

Both the reading in the Book of Genesis and the Gospel of Luke are talking today about the subject of hospitality, in the first case the **hospitality given to strangers**. It was believed in ancient times even beyond Israel that either God or God’s messengers appeared out of the blue as strangers. And **as you treat them, so you are treating God and, therefore, a very significant moment of judgment.**

In the case of **Abraham** of course he **welcomed these strangers**. Whether at the very beginning he realized it was a visitation or not, this is unclear. But the author of Genesis clearly knew it was, and said so: “The Lord appeared to Abraham in the heat of the day.” Now in the case of **Sodom, we see that people mistreated messengers**, and this led to the utter destruction of Sodom. That is the way the ancient people thought.

And we see it reflected in the gospel in the story of Mary and Martha. It’s clear that **Mary had a clear sense of the importance of Jesus and the importance of his visit** in a way that Martha didn’t. Some people like my mother never liked this story. She thought Martha was given the short end of the stick, so to speak, because she was left with all the chores of hospitality and rightly complained. But Jesus does not criticize Martha for her activity or her service but, rather, he is pointing out two things.

First, **hospitality is not just a matter of food and drink**. You know this yourself from your own experience as host and guest. **Hospitality is a matter of being or feeling wanted and making others feeling wanted and, therefore, listened to**. Mary was fulfilling that very

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important role. For this reason many get-togethers begin in the kitchen so that hosts and guests can join together as the final touches are put on the meal.

This wasn't **Martha's** problem. Her **problem was that she didn't appreciate what her sister was doing**, how actually she was helping. She was doing a very important thing: listening to the guest, making the guest feel wanted. **Martha is focused not on Jesus but, sadly, on herself. Mary chose the better part of focusing on her guest and realizing gratefully what and who he was.**

In our lives too **we can be too focused on our own needs**, our own tasks, our own work or our problems, **and not realize the presence of the Lord and the gifts at hand**. This is one reason we need to gather for **Eucharist, to remind ourselves of the presence of the Lord**, not only now today, this morning, but **all week**—and the gifts at hand, not just our problems and our work and our tasks. This is indeed the better part. And it leads away from stress to gratitude and a life of inner peace.