

## 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C - 2007 - Lk 10:38-42

1. The story goes that one night there was aloud knock at the door of the bishop's mansion.
  - a. Standing outside was a worn and ragged man.
  - b. The bishop's servants were reluctant to let him in,
  - c. For a glance at his papers showed that he was a recently released convict.
2. Nevertheless, the bishop commands that he be let in,
  - a. that the finest silver be set out
  - b. and that a sumptuous meal be offered to him.
3. The man is invited to stay the night and after the bishop goes to bed,
  - a. He does what any poor desperate convict would do - steals the silver.
4. The police catch him, recognize the silver and bring him back to the bishop.
5. And then an amazing thing happens;
  - a. the bishop tells the police that the stolen silver was really a gift.
  - b. And chides the convict for leaving so quickly that he forgot the candlesticks !
6. The police leave, and the convict asks if he too is truly free to leave;
  - a. the bishop says that he is,
  - b. but that he should always remember that "Life is to give and not to take."
7. That scene is a powerful turning point
  - a. In the life of the man, named Jean Valjean
  - b. in the plot of the classic novel called *les Miserables* by Alexander Dumas
  - c. And in the Broadway musical that has shared this message with millions.
8. The simple message: *to live is to give*
  - a. has inspired social workers and volunteers,
  - b. Doctors and nurses
9. It is the basis of the promises we make in marriage
  - a. And the vows we take as priests and nuns.
10. It fills our minds with images of happiness found in giving to others,
  - a. an endless Christmas morning of giving, giving and giving. . .
11. Exactly. The fantasy of that giving feeling is exposed
  - a. in the letdown that accompanies it, and the bills that follow it.
12. It is exposed in the number of social workers who quit, volunteers who give up
  - a. Doctors who make millions while their nurses burn out
  - b. Marriages that end, priests who drink and nuns who leave.
13. In fact it was and is the disillusionment that so many experience in giving
  - a. That has raised a generation of people who spend their lives in search of
    - i. more money and bigger houses,
    - ii. faster cars and hotter spouses;
  - b. because who are we fooling? - in the real world to live is to get. Not give.
14. But we do not need to modern life to teach us this:
  - a. We have always had Martha.
15. Martha lived in a society where women were the givers, and people extolled their

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- selflessness as wives and mothers.
16. However one day Jesus visits.
    - a. Martha cooks and serves
      - i. yet her sister Mary goes in sits, and listens to Jesus!
  17. Martha demands Jesus to tell her sister to help her.
    - a. Martha's reaction is like saying, if I have to give, by God, so do you Mary!
  18. And at that moment in Martha we see the truth -
    - a. That even our giving is so often only TO get - even if it is only to get a feeling.
    - b. That is the reason why it is such a sham;
      - i. because what happens when the feeling fades?
        - (1) What happens is that we stop giving-
        - (2) Or start demanding like Martha did, that others start giving too.
  19. Jesus pointed out to Martha that listening to him was the one thing truly necessary. Why?
    - a. What do you suppose Jesus was telling Mary
    - b. that was more important than giving Martha a hand?
  20. Maybe it was some version of that story
    - a. that comes just before today's reading
    - b. about a first - century Jean Valjean who was violated,
      - i. not by prison but by robbers,
    - c. and who was cared for
      - i. not by a bishop, but by a stranger,
    - d. a man whom, if he met him in the street,
      - i. he would have to shun
    - e. And if he ever saw him afterwards,
      - i. he would have to ignore
    - f. Because that man was a Samaritan -
      - i. an unclean outsider according to some,
    - g. But according to Jesus someone who knew something
      - i. that Mary wanted, and Martha and all the rest of us need.
  21. It was the second part of what the bishop said - to live IS to give **but NOT to take**.
  22. We might say that only God could give in that way; and that would be right
    - a. For we believe that Jesus reveals to us who God truly is;
    - b. and in his stories and parables,
    - c. in his healing and teaching, in his life and especially in his death
    - d. Jesus reveals God as the one who gives freely;
    - e. And proposes away of life to us that might be difficult,
    - f. but does not impose it on us
      - i. like Martha tried to do with Mary,
      - ii. and we try to do with one another,
        - (1) giving, but all the while expecting to get in return.

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23. It is little wonder that experiencing such generous giving changes people
- a. It changed Jean Valjean -
    - i. so much so that one of the first things he does after being with the bishop is to stop at a wayside shrine to pray.
  - b. It changed Mary -
    - i. so much so that one of the first things she does is stop working and start listening.
  - c. Because at that moment they saw and heard the God for whom to live is to give and not to get.
24. But we do not know is whether it changed Martha - The story is left unfinished
- a. So what do you think? What did Martha do?
    - i. Did she storm off into the kitchen,
      - (1) unable to accept that her sister, Jesus, life could be so unfair?
    - ii. OR did she sit and listen and begin to let Her life be changed,
      - (1) as her sister's was changed,
      - (2) as Jean's was changed,
      - (3) by a learning that life is to give and not to get?
25. It is not an academic question: for in the story we all are Martha
- a. And we have to choose whether we will follow the one Mary met in Jesus and Jean met in that bishop.
    - i. Oh, if we live to give freely and not to get;
      - (1) to be generous with our food, our time, our possessions, our forgiveness,
    - ii. We may indeed not get anything in return (we usually don't)
      - (1) But everyone who meets us; gets something;
      - (2) they get what Jean got,
      - (3) what Mary got,
      - (4) what Martha got;
      - (5) and we do get every time we come to this place:
        - (a) a chance to meet the one for whom to live is to give and not to get;
        - (b) and the privilege to do the same.