

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME

YEAR C

Prayer

Psalm 15:2-5

Those who walk blamelessly,
and do what is right, and
speak the truth from their
heart;

who do not slander with
their tongue, and do no evil
to their friends, nor take
up a reproach against their
neighbors;

in whose eyes the wicked
are despised, but who honor
those who fear the Lord;
who stand by their oath
even to their hurt;

who do not lend money at
interest, and do not take a
bribe against the innocent.

Those who do these things
shall never be moved.

Reading the Word

First Reading: Genesis 18:1-10

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh



yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him.

Second Reading: Colossians 1:24-28

I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and gen-

FIRST READING

Genesis 18:1-10

PSALM

Psalm 15:2-5

SECOND READING

Colossians 1:24-28

GOSPEL

Luke 10:38-42

erations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Gospel: Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

*Scripture quotations from
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Hearing the Word

"The Greatest Concern"

Today's readings narrate stories about four biblical characters which reveal the central concerns that governed each one's life and mission.

The first reading tells about the encounter between Abraham and three visitors who represent God appearing as angels in human form. This meeting follows the account of the covenant God made with Abraham, and the promise that he would become the father of a great nation (Gen 17:19), a promise which will subsequently be fulfilled (Gen 21:2). Thus, the story of this encounter is placed between the account of the promise and its fulfilment.

The three heavenly visitors appear near Abraham's tent at midday. Observing the customs and rules of hospitality, Abraham first invited the travellers to visit him, provided water for washing their dusty feet, and served them bread as an initial refreshment. A fully-fledged meal of meat, curd and milk followed. Abraham was a perfect host.

The main point of the story is revealed in Abraham's words of invitation, "my Lord if I find favor with you do not pass by your servant". Abraham knows that welcoming a stranger and showing hospitality brings blessings upon the host and his household. By inviting the visiting angels and caring for them Abraham actively sought the blessing that hospitality brings. He

achieved his goal, the angel who spoke for God declared that Abraham's wife, Sarah, would soon bear a son, as God had earlier promised.

The book of Genesis consistently depicts Abraham as a man who responds obediently to God. However, he is never a passive recipient but actively cooperates with God, reaching for the blessing. In today's reading he appears as a man who takes active steps towards the blessing of fatherhood by extending hospitality to the heavenly visitors. He did so because his greatest concern was to fulfil his God-given life goal to become the forefather of God's people, the Israelites.

The second reading contains an autobiographical statement conveying Paul's understanding of himself and his mission. First, Paul informed the readers about his situation describing it as "suffering". This was fully justified because he was languishing in prison facing potential death (Col 4:3). Yet, in his typical fashion, Paul calls his sufferings a privilege and a reason for rejoicing. He describes his afflictions as "completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church". This statement certainly does not imply that Christ's suffering and death was somehow incomplete or insufficient, lacking in effectiveness. Using the word "lack" Paul refers to the scope of Christ's mission, not to its efficacy. The scope of Jesus' earthly ministry was

limited to the Jewish people in Palestine when only a limited number of people heard and understood his message. What Jesus accomplished in his life and death needed to be announced and proclaimed to the whole world, so that all might be given a chance to reap the benefits of his salvific death and resurrection. Paul understands his mission from this perspective. His apostolic mission to the Gentiles is the continuation and completion of Christ's mission on earth, while his current imprisonment and sufferings provide further evidence that he carries on this mission in a Christ-like manner. Like Jesus, Paul lays down his life for the sake of saving the world.

Paul then describes his mission in greater detail as making the word of God fully known to the Gentiles. These foreigners, who were not a part of the covenant community, and who were ignorant of God and God's ways, now receive the divine revelation which Paul calls "the mystery". This mystery is Christ himself, now present in his Church as its head, Lord and saviour. Paul sees himself as the servant of this mystery, that is, he is a revealer of Christ to the Gentiles, so that they too might be counted among God's people, and find salvation which Paul describes as "the hope of glory".

Paul's entire life and mission revolved around the proclamation of Christ to the Gentiles. He placed himself, and all

his life, entirely in the service of this proclamation, knowing that it leads the formerly ignorant Gentiles to wisdom and full maturity as Christians. To bring the Gentiles to faith, and make them wise and fully mature in Christ, was clearly Paul's greatest concern.

The gospel reading presents yet another story of hospitality. On his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus was invited to the house of two sisters, Martha and Mary, who represent two different types of hospitality.

Martha is a householder, who, like Abraham, invites Jesus to her house and caters to his needs. Her sister Mary acts as a disciple. She seats herself at Jesus's feet and listens attentively to his words. This was a typical posture for a student or a disciple at that time in history.

Martha is utterly preoccupied with her domestic duties, acting as a good host. However, this makes her "distracted" and not really concerned with Jesus himself. While serving Jesus she at the same time ignores him. Mary, on the other hand, ignores her social and domestic duties as a co-host and sister to Martha, concentrating on Jesus alone.

Finally, Martha is angry with Jesus and speaks to him respectfully but forcefully, accusing him of indifference to herself and to her work. Moreover, she assumes authority over Jesus telling him what he should command her sister to do. Mary is silent, listening and absorbing Jesus' words. Martha

is a good host but a bad disciple, Mary is a bad host but a good disciple.

Luke uses this contrasting portrayal of the two sisters for instruction. When he reports that Jesus praised Mary for choosing the "the better part" he affirms that true hospitality extended to Jesus consists in listening and absorbing his words. Receiving Jesus and his teaching takes precedence over all other concerns in the disciple's life, it is the disciple's central and greatest concern.

The choice of one's central concern gives shape to one's entire life. God's promise of descendants became the central concern of Abraham's life. Since the birth of Isaac was delayed, Abraham took active steps to bring the promise to its fulfilment and thus fulfil the purpose of his life. Even though locked up in prison, Paul never lost sight of his life's purpose – the participation in Christ salvific mission as the Apostle to the Gentiles. His greatest concern was that the Gentiles should come to know Christ, and attain salvation through faith in him. For Mary, hearing the words of Jesus and welcoming his teaching was more important than any social or customary concerns. Her greatest concern was receiving Jesus and his message. These biblical examples teach that the greatest life concern for a believer must reflect his or her faith commitment. The Psalmist referred to such persons stating, "those who do these things shall never be moved".

Listening to the Word of God

Multitasking has become a common phenomenon nowadays. We are inclined to do so many things at the same time to meet the demands of a fast-paced and competitive world. We do many "good" things for the good of our families and other people. Unfortunately, in the process, many have no time to sit and listen to the one who gives life to our souls.

A car, no matter how fast it runs, will grind to a halt if it runs out of fuel. If one is not fortunate, and the vehicle stops in the middle of nowhere, with no fuel station nearby, one would go through series of unpleasant ordeals. It is dangerous going through this world without enough 'spiritual energy'. There are some whose "spiritual fuel-tanks" have dried up because they had many concerns but not that one concern to keep them truly alive. In the face of challenges, such persons realise that they have no inner strength and they run into crisis. As someone rightly put it, "A life without Christ is full of crisis".

When Mary chose to sit at the feet of Jesus, she chose not to listen to one more of the many rabbis who frequented their towns, to the Word of God himself. In sum, Mary chose to be a disciple and an ardent listener to the Word that gives life. For this reason, Jesus described her as having "chosen the better part".

The same guest, Jesus, who entered the home of Martha and Mary walks among us and knocks at the door of many a heart. Unlike other guests, this one is uniquely different. His primary hunger and thirst is not so much for food and water, important though these are, but for people who would listen to him. The promise Abraham received through a messenger is offered to us directly through the Word of God.

Hospitality is a choice. It entails making time and space to accommodate someone whose presence is meaningful. In the process, it impacts not just the guest but more importantly the host. There is a proverb among the Dagombas of Ghana which states, "stay with the sun and you would become warm; stay with water and you would become wet." Every guest leaves something behind. Similarly, the Word of God affects those who chose to stay with it. Spending quality time with the Word of God rejuvenates and revitalises a person. It is the secret of sanctity. This keeps one going amidst the challenges of life and enables one to arrive at one's destination in life. Indeed, Christ among us the hope of glory (Col 1:27).

Many things and people seek to capture our attention in life but we always have that sublime choice to decide who or what receives our attention. We become what we focus on.

Proverb

“Stay with the sun and you would become warm; stay with water and you would become wet.”

Action

Self-examination

What is the first thing I think of when I wake up in the morning and what is the last thing I think of before I go to bed? What is my greatest concern in life?

Does the Word of God delight my heart or it has no effect on me?

Response to God

I choose to create space and time for the Word of God daily in my life, not just by reading the Bible but to put into practice the Word of God that I hear in the Bible.

Response to your World

Christ the guest desires to enter the homes and hearts of people. I will think of a way to make this possible for someone I know and carry it out.

What can we do as a group to make Bibles available to people? We put the Bible, either in part or whole in our offices and at strategic places in public places with the hope that someone would be moved to pick it and hear the word of God therein.

Prayer

Eternal Father, I yield to your word and give my very self to you this day. As I wait on you daily, renew my strength. May I sprout wings like an eagle, run without getting weary and walk without fainting. Grant this through Christ, our Lord. Amen