

Amos 8:1-12

Psalm 52

Colossians 1: 15-29

Luke 10:38-42

*These sermon notes were prepared before the sermon was delivered and so do not transcribe the actual sermon word for word*

*For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me; so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*

The story of Mary and Martha might present us with a story of two sisters; however it also provides us with a reflection of two aspects of our very being.

We all have a capacity to *toil and struggle*, and we all have an *energy that God [he] powerfully inspires within*

How we align these two 'forces' within ourselves determines our capacity to participate in the Divine creation. We might find ourselves, like Mary and Martha in a place of conflict, however as we become *mature in Christ* so we see these two sisters as one in ourselves.

The readings this week start off in a somewhat abstract way, with a 'basket of fruit'; however abstract images rather than literal realities can be helpful for evoking thoughts that draw us toward an understanding of ourselves and open us to a realisation of ourselves 'in the image of God'.

The first reading from Amos begins with a Divine revelation: "*This is what the Lord GOD showed me--a basket of summer fruit.*"

A revelation of abundance, of harvest and of festive foods; rich feasts would often conclude with a selection of fruits.

Amos sees his Divine revelation, however it is immediately followed with a reality check; "*The songs of the temple shall become wailings..*" And from there the dialogue identifies what 'the Lord' observes, and it is directed to those "*that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land.*"

We might well not appreciate or engage the first reading as it can be readily dismissed as not applying to us. However, if we generalise ourselves, rather than engage our defensive hearing, we might find ourselves as part of that one body that does indeed "*trample on the needy*". Who is responsible for sweatshops in Bangladesh that make our cheap designer clothes? Who is turning away refugees and sending them to the region's most violent country? Who allows university administration staff to be paid over \$700,000 a year while students cannot afford to complete a degree?

When we look at some of our own cultural norms, we can find ourselves complicit in actions that "*trample on the needy*".

Verse 5 in the reading identifies those who are keen for the religious observances to be over so that they can get back to their own agendas, and again it is not that difficult to find ourselves echoed in the narrative from Amos.

The first reading starts with a revelation of Divine abundance and then moves into the reality of the world, a place driven by greed, which is itself born out of fear and a blindness to the Divine abundance. The reading then describes outcomes, and determines that such fears, an orientation of scarcity, leads only to famine, we create the reality in which we live! And we do live in a world, a culture in which there is a thirst and a hunger, unknowingly for most, it is a thirst and hunger for the Divine abundance.

Without an appreciation of the abundance revealed at the start of the reading, the hunger and thirst of humanity will never be satisfied.

The abstract image of the “*basket of summer fruit*” is brought into focus through the theology of the second reading: “*Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation*”; for here is revealed the abundance of the Divine made real in humanity. And here Christ reveals us to ourselves; the Church being the fullness of God and reconciler of all things.

Amos reveals a discrepancy between the scarcity embraced by those who fail to see the Divine abundance, “*basket of summer fruit*” and Paul sees that discrepancy reconciled in Christ who reveals to us the abundance that dwells in all.

Today’s gospel gives us another opportunity to consider our own world view, and the reality we create in our lives.

Mary and Martha, two sisters, are presented in this gospel cameo to reveal two aspects of ourselves; and if we follow the story without seeking to judge one sister over another it is easier to find the Mary and the Martha in us.

Worth reading through the gospel again:

*Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. 39 She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. 40 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." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; 42 there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."*

Although related, these two sisters are seen in competition rather than as complimentary; and yet both offer valuable aspects of service. In Mary and Martha we see a picture of ourselves unintegrated; they provide a contrast with our true Christ-likeness.

Paul on the other hand shows these two aspects integrated; “steadfast in the faith”, Mary; and “a servant of the gospel”, Martha.

In St Benedict’s rule of monastic life, the aspects of Mary and Martha are given equal and complimentary places, and are summed up in the motto, *ora et labora*, pray and work.

For many contemporary church members Martha is a 6 day a week reality and Mary is a Sunday morning affair, and the two are kept quite separate and have separate identities.

Mary and Martha illustrate for us two reference points, related characteristics, and they also illustrate the gap that can identify a separation within ourselves.

When are Mary and Martha are in competition rather than cooperation, we will find ourselves in a place of famine, for usually one or the other have to go without.. Again, if both see that there is a “*basket of summer fruit*”, if they glimpse the reality of abundance then they are drawn toward sharing, and so to cooperation and so to integration, the sisters become one.

Our role of Mary is given light and life in and through our prayer life and our church life; and it serves to complement our role of Martha that is given light and life in our serving others.

When we look for our reflection in today’s gospel do we see two sisters, or do we glimpse the possibility of wholeness, of being, ‘In Christ’.

Paul, in the letter to the Colossians is affirming an orientation for the church that “*may present everyone mature in Christ.*”

And in his life and ministry he shows how his Mary and Martha are integrated into one life orientation; he says: “*29 For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.*”

We all have a capacity to *toil and struggle*, and we all have an *energy that God [he] powerfully inspires within*

How we align these two ‘forces’ within ourselves determines our capacity to participate in the Divine creation.

We might find ourselves, like Mary and Martha in a place of conflict, where the *toil and struggle* works against the *energy that God [he] powerfully inspires within*

However as we become *mature in Christ* so we see these two sisters as one in ourselves. And so too we see ourselves as One Body... in relation with all

*Peace be with You*