

“It Will Not Be Taken Away”

But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42).

We are the most distracted people in the history of the world, because on top of all the disruptions and diversions and that have always plagued humanity...we have smart phones! These hand-held marvels of technology are distraction-making machines. Now, no matter where we are or what we are doing we can check our email, watch the game, look at the weather radar, answer trivia questions, monitor the stock market, do our banking, stream videos, add our voice to social media, take selfies, send texts, play “Words with Friends” and, just in the last week, “Pokemon Go” has become the latest in this long line of electronic distractions. The game works through your smart phone’s GPS and makes cartoon Pokemon characters appear virtually around you as watch your phone screen. As players walk through the real world they are led to locations where they can capture creatures from the Pokemon universe. This new innovation in virtual gaming has taken the nation by storm and it’s also created a whole new level of dangerous distractions as participants walk or drive down streets, totally focused on the their phones, and often oblivious to the world around them.

An article that appeared in Saturday’s “Daily Beast” reported that, “it’s not just traffic accidents that have police officers worried. On Wednesday, firefighters were called to rescue two men in North San Diego County who had walked off a cliff while trying to capture animated creatures.” The article continues: “The two men were playing the game separately – firefighters only found the second man, who was unconscious a few feet below, when they went to rescue the first.”¹

Distraction is a basic human problem and, in today’s Gospel reading, we learn about a woman named Martha who was “distracted” Luke writes, “with much serving” (Luke 10:40). Now, we know from John’s Gospel that Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus were good friends of Jesus. In fact, in John 11, we are told that, “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” And when Jesus came to visit them in their home, there’s no doubt that it was a big deal. Luke’s brief narrative doesn’t tell us much about the visit, but we know from verse 39 that Jesus was teaching. Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Son of God, the promised Messiah; Jesus, the miracle worker and healer and rabbi was in the house of Mary and Martha and He was teaching...and Mary was sitting at His feet listening...and Martha was “distracted with much serving.” Distracted with much serving – that’s what Luke writes, but we learn later in verse 40 that it’s not really Martha’s “much serving” that distracts her, but rather it’s the lack of serving she sees in her sister that causes her distraction. And we can all relate to Martha’s frustration.

About 20 years ago, I went with my dad and brothers on a canoe trip to the boundary waters of northern Minnesota. Our experience was really primitive and included long hours of canoeing each day, followed by setting up camp and enjoying a meal of freeze-dried food before collapsing into your sleeping bag just so you could get up and do it all again the next day. It was a lot of work and, on one particular day, we woke up to a thunderstorm. We broke camp and headed back out onto the water and began to paddle in the rain. As we waited for the rain to break, we grew more miserable with each minute that passed, and, after what must have been six hours of canoeing in the rain, we decided to

¹ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/07/16/pokemon-go-is-the-new-texting-driving.html>

find a campsite. By the time I got out of the canoe, I had been paddling all day, I was soaked from head to toe and chilled to the bone and, needless to say, I was not in a very good mood. We all wanted to get the camp set up as quickly as possible and try to start a fire so we could dry off and warm up. With this goal in mind, we were frantically unpacking our gear and working hard to get the tents and dining flaps raised, and that's when I saw my youngest brother sitting on a log watching the rest of us busting our tails...*and I lost it*. I won't repeat what I said to him, but let's just say that I have a lot sympathy for Martha's indignation. And if you're honest, so do you.

Whether in our work, or at school, or in our family life, we all have an eye on what we think is right and fair and we all keep score, because deep down our sinful nature tells that we are in charge of our own salvation and that the one thing necessary is what we do. And when we see that someone is not pulling their weight, or that our efforts are not being acknowledged and rewarded, our response is often one of anger and resentment and it can lead us to a dangerous place of pride and self-righteousness. "Lord do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?" *Think about this comment!* Martha actually said to Jesus: "Do you not care?" Jesus is sitting in your living room teaching the good news of a God who loves the unlovable, and feeds the hungry, and heals the sick, and shows compassion to the broken-hearted and promises eternal life...and Martha has the audacity to question His care! Martha's complaint is borderline blasphemy and yet, the response of Jesus is not one of reprimand or rebuke. He doesn't condemn her for her selfish heart or petty pride, instead Jesus answers her with the very compassion and care that Martha had questioned! And He does it by first speaking her name: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things."

My friends, today, we have come into the presence of Christ...and we are anxious and troubled about many things. The distractions in our lives are overwhelming and we have, *all of us*, exhausted ourselves trying to even the score or work our way out of our impossible situations. And today, Jesus Christ – the Word made flesh, the Son of God, the One who loves the unlovable, and feeds the hungry, and heals the sick, and shows compassion on the broken-hearted – today, this same Jesus Christ speaks to us with the one thing that is necessary and, my friends, it doesn't come from us. It doesn't come from our hard work; it doesn't come from our much serving; it doesn't come from the position we hold or the responsible decisions we've made or from our good moral choices. The one thing necessary is the grace of God given to us in our Lord Jesus Christ who today serves us with His Word; who today comes to us in His Body and Blood; who today forgives our sins, and removes our distractions, and quiets our anxious hearts, and promises us eternal life.

Jesus Christ came into this world of a billion distractions with the one thing necessary: He came to bear our burdens and to carry the weight of our sin and to embrace the distractions that ruin us and to take them to the Cross. My friends, in your baptism, the burdens, distractions and sins of your nature have been crucified with Christ, and today this same Jesus calls you by name and He speaks to you with the same promise He made to Mary and to Martha: That He is the one thing necessary and that in Him you have the forgiveness of your sins and in Him you have eternal life and in Him these things will not be taken away. Go with the peace of this promise of God to you.

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