

Sunday 17th July 2016 (8th after Trinity)

St Faith, Havant

8.00am – Mass & 9.30am – Parish Mass

Genesis 18:1-10a; Colossians 1:15-28; St Luke 10:38-42

I am the oldest of three children – I have a brother and a sister. Growing up, I often felt like I got a rough deal. I felt like I got into trouble even though I wasn't really doing anything wrong, while they got praised for things I would have been told off for. (Of course, my brother and my sister would probably tell you exactly the same story – that they were always in trouble and I wasn't – but don't believe them. I was the well-behaved one. Honest.) Perhaps some of you felt the same about your brothers, sisters, cousins, friends – no matter how hard you tried to do the right thing, you were always in the wrong and they always came up smelling of roses. As we grow up, the same thing happens at school, college, university, work, the pub, the club, at church; there's always somebody who gets away with things you never could.

As we hear today's gospel reading, I bet Martha felt a bit like that. After all, she'd done exactly the right thing. Jesus turns up at her house and she welcomes him in, which puts on her an obligation of good hospitality. His feet probably needed washing. He'd have needed something to eat, and certainly something to

drink. Perhaps even a bed prepared for the night. None of these things do themselves, so Martha has to go and do them.

Meanwhile, Martha's sister Mary is just sitting there listening to Jesus talk. Well – Jesus was a wandering teacher and preacher. There were lots of opportunities to go and listen to him talk, and there would be plenty more in the future, probably even later that day. But when a guest arrives, you have to do all the things you need to do to be a good host – and Mary isn't helping at all. She's just sitting there. I don't know about you, but I can understand why Martha was getting a bit frustrated. Yet when she speaks up about it to try and get Mary to help with what she should have been doing all along, what does Jesus tell her? "Mary has chosen the better part"! You try your best to do the right thing, and you still end up getting told off!

I don't think Martha's problem was what she was doing. Those tasks all needed to be done, and somebody had to do them. But we're told that Martha was "*distracted* by her many tasks". She wasn't overwhelmed. She didn't lack the skills, or the energy, or the physical capacity to perform the tasks. She was distracted by them. They had taken her attention away from where it should have been focussed – away from the person who should have been her focus. The problem wasn't what

Martha was doing, or when she was doing it. The problem was that she had forgotten *why* she was doing it. Notice that when Jesus gently chides her, he doesn't say 'Martha, stop doing that' – he says "Martha, you are worried and distracted". It wasn't Martha's activities that Jesus corrected, but her focus. Martha's many tasks had distracted her from her Lord. Mary had chosen the better part not because she was sitting still, but because her focus was right. The person, not the process. The important difference between Martha and Mary isn't that Martha was doing things and Mary wasn't. The important difference is that Martha was distracted, and Mary wasn't.

Somewhere along the way of doing the right thing, Martha's focus drifted away from her Lord. It is so easy for the same thing to happen to us as Christians, individually and collectively. We know what tasks lie ahead of us, we know they are good tasks, things that it is right for us to do, so we press on and do them. And somewhere along the way of doing all those right things, our focus drifts away from God. We end up distracted by the tasks themselves.

But notice what Martha does when she is distracted by her many tasks. She doesn't talk to Mary. She talks to Jesus, and he helps her to ensure her focus is returned to where it should

be. That's how we can avoid losing our focus on God, and that's how we can get it back when we inevitably get distracted. Talk to God. Come to him in honest and open prayer – even if that prayer is born out of frustration – 'Lord, do you not care that I've been left to do this by myself? Send someone to help me!'. You may not always get the answer you want or expect – I'm sure Martha wanted Jesus to tell Mary to get up and help her. But in that moment, even though she probably didn't realise it, Martha was already refocussing from her distraction because she talked to her Lord. We too can talk to our Lord, should talk to our Lord, must talk to our Lord, and in doing so we help ourselves not to be distracted; and he will help us too, though his help may not always be quite what we expect.

So whatever your task this week, whether there's a work deadline, guests to entertain, or even the logistics of a well-deserved holiday to manage, give it the attention it deserves, but don't get distracted by it. Whatever our many tasks, let us work individually and collectively to stay focussed on God who calls us to those tasks. Let us ask him to help us stay focussed, and to refocus us when our minds wander, so that all our lives will bring glory to God, and we each in our own small part will help make his kingdom come.