16th Sunday in O.T. 2025

Today’s Gospel tells us that, *“Martha was distracted with all the serving”.* Like Martha, we too face distractions every day, distractions which can even knock us off course. Some are bigger than others, but I suspect we could agree on four principal examples, the first being technology. In this age of constant connectivity, we can get sucked into an endless dependence on our devices, even to the extent of being addicted to them. How much time is lost by scrolling through social media, looking at other people’s lives, checking emails, or playing games? The iPhone, which has many advantages for modern living, can also be a major source of distraction. The late Pope Francis spoke about “high-tech toxicity”! *(Christus Vivit 88)*

People too can be a real source of distraction, particularly so, if we are unfortunate enough to have a neighbour with whom we do not see eye-to-eye. In a state of frustration, we can easily end up gossiping about one another – and gossip is a very unhealthy pathway! Then there are the demands of family life – the family can be a wellspring of worries and tensions, which so absorbs us that we end up not knowing where to turn.

Another source of distraction is that of our own minds. It is all too easy to spend time ruminating on past hurts, and fighting, and refighting, in our minds, old battles – sometimes referred to as “picking at mental scabs”! Also, in this time of the easy availability on-line of so much sexual material, we can slip into the habit of daydreaming on such material, which can lead to “a gradual loss of contact with concrete reality” *(CV 88)*

A further potential area of distraction today are the 24-hour news broadcasts, with the never-ending stream of bad news. We can get caught up in the negativity and lose sight of what is important. There is a prayer which says, “Lord, you are the sole master of the future: save us from despair and the fear of what is to come” *(Morning Prayer, Wed. Wk 3).*

In today’s Gospel, Jesus responds to Martha by saying, *“Martha, Martha, you worry and fret about so many things”.* Martha represents each of us, and Jesus reminds us, as he reminded Martha, *“few things are needed, indeed only one”.* But of course, this, as far as we are concerned, is easier said than done.

St Paul, in today’s second reading, refers to the one necessary thing as *“The mystery is Christ among you, your hope of glory”.* In the tranquillity of our beautiful church, Morning Mass offers us an oasis of peace, in which we are gently drawn into the presence of Jesus himself – that amazing mystery of Christ among us. Our being here, before Christ, is an expression of our desire to be with him; but great as our desire may be, it is as nothing when compared to the desire that he has to be with us. Being here at Mass reminds us of that which Jesus said of Martha’s sister, Mary, *“she has chosen the better part”* – for us, Mass is our choice of the better part, our choice to be with Jesus our Lord.

However, although we may describe Mass as “an oasis of peace”, and although we desire to bask in that peace and in the presence of Christ, we may again find ourselves, like Martha, inundated by all kinds of distractions, and robbed of the peace offered by the presence of Christ. When, as a parish community, we gather for Mass, we suddenly become aware of all sorts of noise, and issues happening around us, which may irritate us no end– and don’t we all have our pet irritations? It might be mobile phones ringing, or people coughing, or the music, or lack of music, or the reader, perhaps even the priest! I once had a lady tell me that the sound of my voice distracted her from her prayers – and she wasn’t being complimentary! We can come with good intentions to this “oasis of peace”, and yet, for one reason or another, we can leave annoyed, perhaps even angry.

The question is “how can we overcome these distractions?” First, we have to accept that we can never eliminate them – there are always going to be distractions of one kind or another. We need to also accept that our worship as a community is never going to be perfect – there will always be aspects that could be done better, or perhaps not done at all! But we can, with a little effort, be determined not to allow any of these things to throw us off track. In other words, we must keep in mind the primary purpose of our being together in the church – our desire to choose the better part, and to be in the presence of Jesus. Amid the noise, even din, of everyday life, we keep in mind the Lord’s gentle invitation, *“Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest” (Mt.11:28).*

*“Lord Jesus,*

*we come here as your guest.*

*Amid the cares and distractions of our daily lives,*

*make us attentive to your voice*

*and alert to your presence,*

*that we may treasure you above all else.”* **Amen**