

16th Sunday (C)

17th July 2016

'Holy holidays'

Gen 18: Abraham offers hospitality to the Lord. Ps 14: *The just will live in the presence of the Lord.* Col 1: *The mystery hidden for centuries has now been revealed.* Lk 10: 38–42: *Mary has chosen the better part ...*

It's a lovely co-incidence that just as the schools are breaking up and our minds turn to thoughts of holidays, we hear in Luke's Gospel this account of Our Lord taking some rest at the house of His friends Martha and Mary. So much of Christ's ministry was punishingly tiring — crowds pressing round Him, looking for miracles, hoping for healing, yearning for inspiring teaching about God. Yet the Son of God was not only true God but also and always true man — Jesus was no more immune from bodily tiredness and bodily temptations than we are. That's the amazing truth of what it meant for God to become man — He is like us in every way, but is without sin. So, Jesus also needed to find time to spend in the quiet company of friends, relaxing from His tiring mission.

We all know from experience that there are at least two ways of taking a holiday. There's the pack-it-all-in type of holiday when you go all-out for visiting every site

and attraction possible. And then there's the let-it-go type of holiday when you just fit in what you feel like fitting in. I've certainly been on holidays of the first sort: I remember charging round the sights of southern Spain, once — Granada, Cordoba, Sevilla — in 40 degrees, everyone's tempers getting frayed and all getting rather worn out and tired of each other. And perhaps I've learnt better of late how to take holidays of the second sort, in which you let everyone go at their own pace, no-one rushed or hassled. The key to enjoying the second sort is the knowledge that it's the *being* with others that is the most important, not so much what you can fit in *doing*.

Jesus seems to advocate just such an approach in the house of Martha and Mary. He isn't ungrateful for all the efforts Martha is going-to to make Him at home and welcome and fed. But He wants to remind her that what is more restorative is to do what Mary has done — to stop rushing around, and to be with Him in a moment of stillness. We help restore each other by our time with each other, our concern and our gentle encouragements of love.

And it's more true still when it comes to our relationship with God in Christ. We can only be restored and re-created when we sit at His feet and listen quietly. Even in the Church the better part is the part which is prayer and contemplation — even though on top of that we must have all sorts of active service for the running of the parish and the helping of those in any sort of need. But the heart of building up the body of Christ is the immediate love of God and prayer to God. That can never be replaced by any amount of rushing around doing things. And that was Jesus's point to Martha: not that Mary should never do anything to help, but that her moment of prayerful relationship with Christ shouldn't be replaced by anything — “she has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken from her.” What a privileged position she had, there, sitting at Our Lord's feet and listening to Him. Who would not cherish that sacred opportunity? Every word that Jesus speaks is the “Word of God,” let's not forget! Hearing that word “live,” so to speak, must have been such a moment of grace for Mary, at His feet, absorbing into her heart the

blessed message of the Gospel, straight from the sacred heart of Jesus, the Son of God. We need to learn this lesson of “sitting at the Lord's feet” and quietly, in stillness, receiving His gentle Gospel peace.

As we look to holidays and hopefully a bit of a rest, let's bear this point in mind: that real comfort, renewal and refreshment can only come from being in touch with our God and Creator. We can't be properly refreshed without being restored spiritually; and we can't be restored spiritually without quiet and prayer — so, as we perhaps take some time off in the next few weeks to go on holiday, let's try to give back some of that time to God Himself. If all the year is busy and a rush, perhaps holiday time need not be, and the temptation to push prayer to one side can be overcome. Far more than any amount of sightseeing, it is seeing God, in Himself, and in His image in each other, that will give real holiday to our hearts.