



# Presence

**Scripture** Lk 10:38-42

## Jesus Visits Martha and Mary

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

## Notes

*Pope Francis, The Angelus, 17 July 2016*

**I**n bustling about and busying herself, Martha risks forgetting — and this is the problem — the most important thing, which is the presence of the guest, Jesus in this case. She forgets about the presence of the guest. A guest is not merely to be served, fed, looked after in every way. Most importantly he ought to be listened to. Remember this word: Listen! A guest should be welcomed as a person, with a story, his heart rich with feelings and thoughts, so that he may truly feel like he is among family. If you welcome a guest into your home but continue doing other things, letting him just sit there, both of you in silence, it is as if he were of stone: a guest of stone. No. A guest is to be listened to. Of course, Jesus' response to Martha — when he tells her that there is only one thing that needs to be done — finds its full significance in reference to listening to the very word of Jesus, that word which illuminates and supports all that we are and what we do. If we go to pray, for example, before the Crucifix, and we talk, talk, talk, and then we leave, we do not listen to Jesus. We do not allow him to speak to our heart. Listen: this is the key word. Do not forget! And we must not forget that in the house of Martha and Mary, Jesus, before being Lord and

Master, is a pilgrim and guest. Thus, his response has this significance first and foremost: "Martha, Martha why do you busy yourself doing so much for this guest even to the point of forgetting about his presence? — A guest of stone! — Not much is necessary to welcome him; indeed, only one thing is needed: listen to him — this is the word: listen to him — be brotherly to him, let him realize he is among family and not in a temporary shelter.

Understood in this light, hospitality, which is one of the works of mercy, is revealed as a truly human and Christian virtue, a virtue which in today's world is at risk of being overlooked. In fact, nursing homes and hospices are multiplying, but true hospitality is not always practised in these environments. Various institutions are opened to care for many types of disease, of loneliness, of marginalization, but opportunities are decreasing for those who are foreign, marginalized, excluded, from finding someone ready to listen to them: because they are foreigners, refugees, migrants. Listen to that painful story. Even in one's own home, among one's own family members, it might be easier to find services and care of various kinds rather than listening and welcome. Today we are so taken, by excitement, by countless problems — some of which are not important — that we lack the





capacity to listen. We are constantly busy and thus we have no time to listen. I would like to ask you, to pose a question to you, each one answer in your own heart: do you, husband, take time to listen to your wife? And do you, woman, take time to listen to your husband? Do you, parents, take time, time to “waste”, to listen to your children? or your grandparents, the elderly? — “But grandparents always say the same things, they are boring...” — But they need to be listened to! Listen. I ask that you learn to listen and to devote more of your time. The root of peace lies in the capacity to listen.”

***This is the first, the wildest and the wisest thing I know: that the soul exists and is built entirely out of attentiveness***

*Mary Oliver*

## **The Old Grandfather’s Corner (The Brothers Grimm)**

Once upon a time there was a very old man who lived with his son and daughter-in-law. His eyes were dim, his knees tottered under him when he walked, and he was very deaf. As he sat at table his hand shook so that he would often spill the soup over the table-cloth or on his clothes, and sometimes he could not even keep it in his mouth when it got there. His son and daughter were so annoyed to see his conduct at the table that at last they placed a chair for him in a corner behind the screen, and gave him his meals in an earthenware basin quite away from the rest. He would often look sorrowfully at the table with tears in his eyes, but he did not complain.

One day, while he was thinking sadly of the past, the earthen-ware basin, which he could scarcely hold in his trembling hands, fell to the ground and was broken. The young wife scolded him well for being so careless, but he did not reply, only sighed deeply. Then she bought him a wooden bowl for a penny and gave him his meals in it. Some days afterward his son and daughter saw their little boy, who was about four years old, sitting on the ground and trying to fasten together some pieces of wood. “What are you making, my boy?” asked his father. “I am making a little bowl for papa and mamma to eat their food in when I grow up,” he replied. The husband and wife looked at each other without speaking for some minutes. At last they began to shed tears, and went and brought their old father back to the table, and from that day he always took his meals with them and was never again treated unkindly.

## **Questions for Reflection**

1. In what ways does our ‘doing’ interfere with out ‘being’? What impact does this have on our relationships? As individuals? As a community?
2. Are there people within our community who feel hidden or silenced? What can we do to create room for their stories to be heard?

***Grant me to recognise in other men and women my God,  
the radiance of your own face***

*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

## **Closing Prayer**

### **Suggestions for Giving the Present of Presence**

- Be with someone who needs you.
- Be with a person who gives you hope.
- Be with those who live in terror and fear.
- Be with an older person.
- Be with someone who has helped you to grow.
- Be with one who is in pain.
- Be with a war-torn country.
- Be with yourself.
- Be with someone who has written to you.
- Be with a child.
- Be with a refugee who is feeling from harm.
- Be with an enemy or someone you dislike.
- Be with a farmer losing his or her land.
- Be with some who has terminal illness.
- Be with the homeless.
- Be with those who suffer from substance abuse.
- Be with hungry children.
- Be with a co-worker.
- Be with those whose hope is faint.
- Be with world leaders.
- Be with someone in your family.
- Be with men and women in prison.
- Be with someone working for justice.
- Be with those who are abused and neglected.
- Be with your loved ones.

*(Joyce Rupp, Out of the Ordinary)*

