

Summertime is a time to have people over for a party or a picnic, or a barbeque. It is a time to extend hospitality. But NOTHING we do in our society comes close to the spirit of hospitality of the people living in Jesus' time.

Expectation of Middle Eastern hospitality

- **Food**
- **Drink**
- **Welcome**

That is why Jesus could tell his disciples, when they were traveling they were to stay in the house of the people who offered hospitality and eat whatever they give you. There is no doubt in Jesus' mind that his disciples, even when they enter into a new town, will be welcomed and cared for.

Middle Eastern hospitality is much like hospitality I experienced while visiting in Cameroon, Africa.

- **Wherever we stopped on our travels in Cameroon: people with place before you food and drinks. They would put out everything they had.**
- **A few years ago here in the U.S.A., I was visiting recent African immigrants: three or four choices of drink and food.**
 - **They just sat there and watched me imbibe: they did not have enough for themselves and me.**

In today's gospel, Jesus arrives on the way to Jerusalem at the house of Martha and Mary. Since there were no cell phones, in fact no phones at all, you never knew when a person might visit you. But whoever showed up and whenever they arrived, the natural expectation was to extend hospitality.

And so, in today's gospel, Martha goes into gear; But, very surprisingly, Mary doesn't help her. Mary sits at the feet of Jesus.

For a Jewish person in Jesus' time, sitting at the feet of Jesus was the only way to learn.

There were no masters degree in theology. Rather, you followed a master; lived with him; traveled with him; Sleep next to him. You would take in not only is his knowledge but his way of living.

Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus. She is acting as a disciple totally amazed how Jesus reveals the very unconditional love of God.

Martha, however, is busy with hospitality. She complains to Jesus that Mary is not helping her.

Jesus responds to Martha with those famous words, "Martha, Martha, your sister Mary has chosen the better part!" Jesus is simply saying that the work of hospitality is wonderful, but it is very important to check out what moves me to extend hospitality to others.

- Do I do the work of hospitality for family honor for the most fabulous family reunion?
- Do I do the work of hospitality for fame of throwing the biggest and best party?
- Do I do the work of hospitality to show off my new dishes or culinary skills? The new chip dip or barbeque sauce?
- Do I do the work of hospitality to look good in the eyes of others? (maybe my relatives will like me more)
- Or do I do the work of hospitality, whether that is welcoming a relative or a stranger or an orphan or a widow as a way of extending to them the unconditional love of God with which I have been so richly blessed?

Jesus is saying to Martha (and to you and me), if we do any of our good deeds, hospitality included, out of any other motive than a response to unconditional love, we will always end up feeling short changed.

(pause)

Today we live in a time of multi-tasking. There is SO MUCH to do, SO MUCH to get done:

- with the kids
- and the grandkids,
- at work,
- in the home.

And ALL those things are good! But if we do all those things out of any other motive than have been unconditionally loved, I can assure you that we will get burned out, get angry at others who do not do their part, and feel left out or passed over.

That is why Jesus is saying to Martha, the perfect poster child of the burned out multi-tasker, that Mary has chosen the better part. Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus experiencing the unconditional love of God, receiving the only source of lasting energy which will make her a perfect host.