

July 21, 2013: Mary & Martha

In the Nobel Prize winning author Elie Wiesel's book "Souls on Fire: Portraits and legends of Hasidic Masters," he shares a marvelous anecdote of Menahem Mendl, a charismatic Eastern European Hasidic rabbi of the nineteenth century beloved for his learning, wisdom and holiness.

So popular was the esteemed teacher that he attracted the attention of many of the youth and young husbands of the village in which he lived, Tomashov. As a result the village quickly became known as the capital of youth. But not all were pleased. Many of the mothers and young wives were upset, believing they had been abandoned by their loved ones. It came to pass that a group of the aggrieved women stormed the rabbi's house, demanding that the holy man return their sons or husbands to them. To no avail. Every human being, said the rabbi, owes his life to three authors: father, mother and God. And God's share in man has priority. Besides, even if he had relented, his students would have refused to leave him. One does not leave a place, a community where every moment is a memorable experience.

In today's gospel reading (Lk. 10:38-42) Christ, the Eternal Word and Wisdom incarnate entered the home of Martha and Mary. Is it any wonder that she was found at the feet of Jesus, listening to his every word? Truly, Mary has chosen the better part (10:42).

The gospel story reminds me of a conversation I once had with my Spiritual Director at St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester. It was my first year of studies and I was very active, serving on the Academic committee, distributing Holy Communion to the sick at one of the local hospitals on Sundays, and enrolling in a course at the Protestant seminary. Father Darling, the school's Spiritual director, sat me down and told me that I failed to acknowledge someone who passed me in the corridor a few days earlier. By failing to return his greeting, I had acted in a most rude fashion.

I then complained. "You must be mistaken," I said. "Please identify the person so that I may offer him an apology. "He replied, "The one you failed to acknowledge was Jesus Christ Himself!"

His point was unmistakable. My frenzied life of work and activities was impeding my relationship with the Lord. My failure to see the Lord was my own fault! Listening comes before work and activities!

Another memory: Years ago, while I was the associate pastor at Sacred Heart Church, I often took several young boys to the Catholic High and LaSalle basketball games. Many of the games were thrilling. In the fourth quarter, on one particular occasion the game was tight and the fans in the bleachers were screaming and encouraging the players to play well and so ensure victory. It was a madhouse. But where were my boys? At the concession stand looking to buy popcorn!

In truth, are we not like those boys? The Lord invites us to listen to him and we are elsewhere, probably buying popcorn!

The Lord invites us to listen to His Word. How will we respond to his gracious invitation?

Amen