

Homily. 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. C. 16/17 July 2022.

It's the work of a lifetime for all of us. A work that changes us, helping us become people who can change our world. This work before us is to learn every day how to listen more clearly.

Abraham learnt this late in life. He managed to hear God's call which launched him and his family on a journey to a land God would show him. This led him to the Oak of Mamre where, still learning to listen, he was able to perceive in the 3 visiting strangers the presence of God at his door. This became possible for this father of nations and peoples because he was hospitable and humble, welcoming and attentive, receptive and responsive. They left him with a promise, a gift that would fulfil all others

Just like us, Jesus had friends in His life. The family from Bethany, an hours walk outside Jerusalem, were among His closest. We know that He visited and stayed with them often when He was in Jerusalem and that He raised Lazarus from the dead, an act that would seal His own fate.

On one of these visits St. Luke tells us of the 2 sisters, Martha and Mary. Both were hospitable, welcoming and receptive, each in their different ways. Martha, however, had let herself become distracted and burdened. It was Mary who was open, humble and responsive in the way most needed. Her receptiveness, the better part, was not to be taken away. In replying to Martha Jesus was nudging her to learn from Mary's way.

The food and drink always matters but its role is to support the listening, not to fill us with an anxiety that overshadows it. If we're going to come to the place of deep listening and responsiveness, then we've got to realise that we need to hear what is being offered even more than we the need the food and drink which serves it. This requires humility, our honesty with ourselves about what matters most of all and first of all.

At the Oak of Mamre Abraham came to know this like Mary did at Bethany. Martha was still learning how to put herself and her distractions aside, how to clear away some space within herself so that she could clearly hear what the Lord was offering; to feed her on the better part.

I often think how like Martha I am. Perhaps you are too? Trying hard to be welcoming and receptive, then discovering that I'm too cluttered by nagging distractions and pressures to be fully attentive and responsive. Humility is the key here to opening up our ears and unstopping hearts. In the heat of our daily pressures humility lets us see in visiting strangers God's own self. It frees us to sit quietly at Jesus feet like Mary did, giving ourselves over to His loving words and wisdom which feeds our souls.

Jesus is feeding us on Himself right now. This is so that we can be His food and drink for others in their hunger and thirst. If we live our lives learning the art of attentive listening it will help us to solve a lot of our own problems and resolve many of our conflicts. It will bring us greater peace, wholeness and holiness of living, which when all is said and done, is the entire point of our Christian lives as the Baptised and reborn people of God, Christ's sisters and brothers, the Church today .