Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ
https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Date: Sunday, July 20, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Genesis 18:1–10a
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 15:2–5 | **Response:** Psalm 15:1b
Second Reading: Colossians 1:24–28
Gospel Acclamation: Luke 8:15
Gospel Reading: Luke 10:38–42
Preached at: the Chapel of Richartz House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

Dear brothers in Christ,

Some years ago, I visited an elderly Jesuit who was mostly blind, hard of hearing, and no longer able to write. But each morning, he would sit in his chair and pray over the day's readings with a battered breviary and a silence that seemed full. "I can't do much," he said to me, "but I can listen. And I think that's what the Lord wants from me now." I've never forgotten that. It was the Gospel in miniature.

Today's Gospel from Luke draws us into a familiar and very human scene. Jesus comes to the home of His friends. One sister is hard at work; the other sits in stillness. And in a single sentence—"Mary has chosen the better part"—Jesus unsettles many of our assumptions about service, time, and what matters most.

Martha, who welcomes Jesus into the home, is active, responsible, and no doubt motivated by love. Like Abraham in our first reading from Genesis, she offers hospitality to the Lord. Abraham runs to meet the three visitors at Mamre, hurries to prepare food, and urges them to stay. His actions, though, are carried out with a certain reverence and peace. The Fathers of the Church, including Saint Ambrose, saw in Abraham's welcome a profound foreshadowing of the Holy Trinity, recognizing the divine presence in these guests . Similarly, Saint Augustine reflected on this encounter, noting how the appearance of three figures conveyed the presence of the one God, thus revealing the mystery of the Trinity . The tradition recognizes this moment not just as a model of hospitality, but as a revelation of God Himself.

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-07jul-20-yc-ot-16/

Martha, in her way, is also responding to God in her home. But here is the contrast. While Abraham's hospitality is marked by stillness in the heart, Martha's becomes clouded by distraction. She is "worried and upset about many things," and her focus shifts from attending to Jesus to comparing herself to Mary. "Lord, do you not care…?" she asks. Her frustration spills out—not just from fatigue, but from forgetting the guest she is serving. Jesus does not scold her. He gently reorients her gaze: "You are worried and upset about many things. Only one thing is necessary."

Mary, by contrast, is sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to His word. That's the key. She's not passive. She is attentive. This phrase—"at His feet"—was the classic position of a disciple. And what Jesus praises is not a personality type or temperament, but a disposition of the heart: the willingness to receive the Word. In a world often obsessed with output, Mary reminds us that discipleship begins with presence. The Greek used to describe Martha's work is *διακονίαν/diakonian*—service, ministry. It is good and essential. But Mary's choice gestures toward something deeper: the *kerygma*, the Word received in stillness so that it may later be proclaimed in truth. One serves; the other listens—but listening is never an end in itself. It is the soil where proclamation begins.

Saint Augustine, reflecting on this passage, writes that Mary "was resting in the Word of the Lord." He contrasts her stillness with the busyness that passes away. Martha's actions are necessary, but temporary. Mary's stillness is rooted in eternity. He says: "One is troubled with much serving, the other is intent on the sweetness of the Lord's word." That is why hers is called the "better part"—not because service is unimportant, but because contemplation is what endures.

Pope Francis often speaks of the primacy of listening. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he writes that "listening helps us to find the right gesture and word" that reveal we are not mere bystanders but participants in God's work[1]. Elsewhere, he reminds us that "listening is an act of love" and is "at the heart of trust"[2]. Without listening, nothing truly grows. It is the ground from which real relationships—and real mission—begin.

And where do we learn this listening best? In the Eucharist. Pope Francis calls the Eucharist the "sacrament *par excellence* of encounter with the person of Jesus" and says it "contains the entire spiritual wealth of the Church, that is, Christ himself"[3]. Through the Eucharist, Christ not only nourishes us spiritually

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-07jul-20-yc-ot-16/

but also profoundly shapes our very being, fostering a deeper coherence between the divine life we receive and the way we live our daily lives. The Eucharist is not something we make. It is something given—a mystery in which Christ Himself acts, gathers, and feeds us. And in that silent reception, the *kerygma* becomes flesh again. Our service—our *diakonia*—then flows not from pressure, but from praise.

This is not about choosing between two good things—prayer or service—but about the order of things. Pope Benedict XVI once wrote that "activity undertaken to help one's neighbour… is not to be condemned. But it is essential that it be imbued also with the spirit of contemplation." [4] Pope Francis echoes this when he warns that "charity without prayer risks becoming philanthropy that soon exhausts itself," and that "without daily prayer lived with fidelity, our acts are empty… reduced to being mere activism"[5].

Diakonia without *kerygma* exhausts us. *Kerygma* without *diakonia* becomes abstraction. But when the Word is truly received, service becomes radiant. Think of the missionary who first prays with the sick before organising their medicine, or the teacher who prepares her lessons on her knees. The listening heart energises the serving hands.

Paul, in the second reading from Colossians, reveals another face of discipleship—suffering. "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake," he writes. Paul's mission is not only active and outward. It is also interior. He carries the pain of the Church in his own body and offers it for Christ. This is not stoic endurance. It is mystical participation. As Jesuits, we know this pattern well. It is the call to offer even our limitations—our health, our ageing, our waiting—as part of the greater work of the Kingdom. It is the *magis* of self-offering.

We know what it is to be Martha—busy in the vineyard, organising ministries, preparing talks, solving community problems. And perhaps now, in later years, we're asked to learn from Mary. To sit still. To listen. Not to be unproductive—but to trust that Christ is present, even when we do less.

There is another dimension here too. Zimbabwe, like so many places, suffers from many burdens—economic injustice, failing infrastructure, deep discouragement. In this setting, we often feel the temptation to do more, fix more, worry more. But we are reminded today that the renewal of society must begin with listening—listening to God, to one another, to the voices often left unheard. It is

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-07jul-20-yc-ot-16/

not withdrawal. It is deeper engagement. The temptation is to plunge straight into *diakonia*, but unless we've first been reshaped by the *kerygma*, we offer only our strength, not the Lord's.

Ignatius teaches us in the Spiritual Exercises to "ask for interior knowledge of the Lord, who became man for me, that I might love Him more and follow Him more closely." [6] That's Mary's position at His feet. That's the heart of the Exercises. And perhaps it's the call of this season in our lives: to make space again to hear His voice. In the stillness, in the Eucharist, in the ordinary routines of our days.

So we are not being asked to stop serving. But we are being asked to serve differently. From a place of inner freedom, not anxiety. From attention, not distraction. From love, not obligation. When we begin with listening, our doing becomes grace-filled. When we sit at His feet, our work becomes worship.

Let me leave you with three questions to carry into your prayer this week:

- Where in my day am I truly listening to the Lord, as Mary did?
- In what ways has my service become restless or distracted, and how might I return to stillness?
- How can I, like Paul, unite even my limitations to Christ's mission—for the Church, for this country, for those entrusted to me?

Amen.

---

1. Pope Francis, ***Evangelii Gaudium*, 171**. ↩
2. Pope Francis, **Message of the Holy Father, signed by the Cardinal Secretary of State, to mark the 46th European meeting of young people organized by the Taizé Community in Ljubljana, (28 December 2023 - 1st January 2024), 28 December 2023** ↩
3. Pope Francis, **Apostolic Constitution Vultum Dei quaerere on women's contemplative life, *Vultum Dei Quaerere* 22**, 22 July 2016 / Second Vatican ecumenical council, Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5; cf. Code of Canon Law, can. 899. ↩
4. Pope Benedict XVI, **Catechesis, 25 April, 2012** ↩

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-07jul-20-yc-ot-16/

5. Pope Francis, **Eighth World Day of the Poor, 2024** ↩

6. St Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, [104]. ↩

Source: https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-07jul-20-yc-ot-16/

This homily is shared for personal and pastoral use. Please attribute the author and do not alter the meaning when quoting. If you wish this homily to be translated - there is an option on the website which will allow you to translate it into the language of your choice.

Licenced under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license.

The author does not speak for the Society of Jesus or for the Catholic Church.

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **WhatsApp**

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **Telegram**

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **Signal**

Scan for Website on **Clearnet**

Scan for Onion Mirror **via TOR**

In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.