

# Martha, Mary Put Focus on ‘The Better Part’

Is there any doubt that we are creatures of anxiety?

This weekend’s Gospel reading from Luke finds Martha and Mary greeting Jesus for a visit. We know the story. Martha rushes around preparing food and drink to serve Jesus, while her sister Mary seemingly does nothing, sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening while he speaks. Martha grows agitated by her sister’s apparent laziness and implores Jesus make Mary help her with the preparations.

Jesus replies to Martha: *“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.”*

Jesus telling Martha she is anxious and worried about many things spoke to me, because Jesus obviously knew that, even beyond her hurriedness and flurry of activity on his behalf, Martha had other things on her mind and in her heart that were preventing her from experiencing “the better part.”

I can empathize with Martha. I have always been prone to anxiety. I have battled it my whole life. I have taken anxiety’s ugly cousins — stress and worry — to legendary levels. My father has told me more times than I can count that I am “my mother’s son,” as my mother, bless her heart, is a ball of anxiety and worry.



*(CNS photo/Nancy Phelan Wiechec)*

I have worked hard over the years to find ways to reduce my overall anxiety, to varying degrees of success and failure. But this Gospel reading made me pause and reflect on how as Catholic Christians, there is much going on in our present-day world that can fuel our anxiety to dangerously high levels.

We see a culture and society increasingly thumbing its collective nose at God (and

Jesus Christ) more and more each day and the consequences are not pretty. Religious liberties, which we have enjoyed as a country since its founding, are under assault by our government leaders. Issues that are so central to not only our faith but the long-standing foundational aspects of society, such as the sanctity of life and the protection of marriage, are being altered, redefined and overrun. This can all lead to great anxiety, stress and worry.

We can all see ourselves in Martha's shoes.

But there's good news. There are antidotes to anxiety that we feel. First, we can actually DO something. Hopelessness can creep in when we feel anxiety and worry, which can lead to us standing still or giving up. But if we jump into the fray, roll up our sleeves and face anxiety head on, our stress will lessen. We do this by being disciples of the Gospel. We share the good news, as we've seen Jesus imploring his disciples to do in the Gospel readings in recent weeks. We do this by understanding our faith and professing it unabashedly and without shame. We do this by standing up for what we believe in, even if it means we will be mocked, shamed, laughed at or humiliated. If we are Catholics, we must do this!

Secondly, and most importantly - we sit at the feet of Jesus and listen, as Mary did. In the stillness of silence and in earnest prayer, our loving Lord hears our prayers and supplies us with the all that need. Jesus is "the better part." In truth, he is the BEST part. But if we are immersed in busyness, if we are distracted by frivolous activity, we increase our chances of feeling anxiety, because we are not placing ourselves in the light and love of Christ.

During the Lord's Prayer, as we pray to God the Father, the celebrant says "In your mercy keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety, as we await the joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ."

If we focus on doing all we can to be more like Mary and less like Martha, we will surely be protected from anxiety and become the true disciples of Jesus.

Peace to you!