

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Martha, Martha!

Big-hearted Martha gives you a real sense of the reliability of the Gospels. She's a relatively minor character in the story, but she happens to come down to us in *both* the traditions that carry the Gospel: the triple source of Matt-Mark-Luke, and the singleton, John. And even though they tell quite different stories about her, she is quite obviously the same person in both traditions.

Life In The Kitchen

You don't have to be Gordon Ramsay to get worked up in a kitchen. If, like me, you tend to get carried away with the need to keep everything hot and at the same time present everything fresh, and if you are foolish enough to think that you can present three or four beautifully-cooked hot dishes like some superb restaurant, then you will find yourself running round in ever-decreasing circles; and you will probably have moments when you become unreasonably jealous of the idle so-and-so's who are sitting enjoying themselves over the aperitifs, while you keep one bleary eye on the asparagus and the other on the hollandaise, not forgetting the roast potatoes and the gravy which are perhaps on too high a flame, and the carrots which are quietly boiling dry under their innocent pan lid.

Nemesis In An Apron

It is at such times that we are in danger of appearing in the calm of the sitting-room, puce and furious, with a faint whiff of brimstone curling behind us, loudly proclaiming our rights. We have by this time well and truly spoiled the occasion, to which we had devoted so much effort. Everyone feels sorry and either ashamed or angry. It is very bad behaviour! But don't think that this story of Jesus has been saved simply to tell us how to behave when we're entertaining. It's much deeper than that.

Active And Passive

There's a way of living your life that puts you always in the driving seat. *It's down to me*, you say, *if I don't do it who will?* Perhaps no-one will, is the answer; and if so, would it matter? Life doesn't always respond to heavy planning and effort. And this is because life itself is a huge *gift*. Contrary to popular belief, it isn't what we make it, and we don't only get out of it what we put into it. Rather, the very best things are precisely the ones we didn't dare to hope for, and could never have

afforded, and would not have chosen, much less designed. The unlooked-for present, the transfiguring love, the relationship that explodes like a star-shell and changes us for life - these things aren't of our making. They make all our manipulation and plotting look mean and ridiculous.

Sisters

Martha and Mary shouldn't be at loggerheads. They're sisters, and they love each other; they both want the same thing, to welcome Jesus to their home. If both of them become lost in the clanging fury of Martha's kitchen, there will be nobody left to sit with their guest, giving to him what he really came for: the attentive affection of good friendship. There's no doubt Jesus loves Martha: but it's hard to enjoy the mingled crashing and escaping steam and muttered expletives that are all we can hear from her. She would have done better to make a nice pan of soup, and serve a simple salad and some cheese - and to have been free to share the calm pleasure of welcoming a much-loved friend. Then both the sisters would have been receivers of a gift, instead of creating a scene of discord and sadness in their home. *Only one thing is necessary!*

Grace

This lovely word, *grace*, refers to the love of God which we could never earn or deserve. It is already there in our making (God creates nothing he doesn't love). It is there in his forgiveness and our whole redemption. This is all gift, not at all of our earning or deserving. There is great grace in learning to receive as well as give, and in every relationship, every community, there must be both giving and receiving for everyone. It is not perfect love to do everything for someone, leaving them nothing to do in response. How good to see a family where everyone helps, taking the burdens off a hard-working mum, everyone contributing to what everyone will share! I hope Martha will be given an honoured place, and have her apron taken off her, and made to remember her manners, and poured a generous G and T while Mary goes to close down the campaign in the scullery as quickly as possible, so that soon they will be sitting down comfortably together, and then that deep courtesy which consists in feeding one another can start to unfold.

Fr Philip