

### The Feast Of The Blessed Martini

My favourite meals are the sort that are delivered effortlessly from a heated trolley and are miraculously fresh and unspoilt. They have a nice balance of hot and cold courses, and there is never too much to eat, and never too little. I myself have finished my work by the time the guests arrive, and I am on hand, washed, combed and suave, generously dispensing the excitingly-coloured freight of the cocktail trolley, along with warm rolls of *gougère* and delicious crab-pink and asparagus-green canapés. The table is a blinding expanse of white damask, perfectly-polished silver cutlery glints upon the china, and glimmering candles send gleams of spectral colours flashing through the beautifully chilled gold of the Meursault and the splendid crimson of the Barolo in their glorious decanters....what d'you say? Er, yes, a pack of lies from beginning to end.

#### St Martha, Pray For Us

In actuality, the scene is more like Martha's place; everything late, forgotten, and critical: pans boiling over or boiling dry: sudden discoveries of the total lack of butter, salt, or pre-heated ovens. And growing pools of self-pity, the loneliness of the long-distance cook. (Why did I ever think of a fish course anyway? There'll be enough to feed a small army...why does everyone come early when I'm always running late?) The truth is, we try too hard, and then we end in tears. But it's often like that. And our wisdom in more serious things than dinners is just as off-kilter. Martha warns us that it's when we're giving it both barrels - when we're really pulling all the stops out - that we're most likely to lose the plot. It's certainly when we're most likely to get, and give, hurt.

#### Balance And Grace

I think we never exhaust the meaning of *antithesis*: that lovely business of sharing and relating which makes life like an intricate dance. Marriage is an antithesis, at many levels, where a woman and a man gracefully accept and give, accept and give themselves to each other; each affirmed, each honoured, each respected and restored by the accurate regard of the other. A good friendship gives and receives, often humorously, but always deeply and faithfully. How beautifully we have learned to express this mystery in exquisite music, where one instrument takes

up a theme, and hands it over to another, so that there is dialogue and response, a time to listen and a time to reply, each sound in the consort making its contribution; or in a dance, where there is a constant shared sense of movement, always making room for itself by sensitive forethought and consideration. But reality often lags behind art; how we blight our real lives by exhaustion, by over-ambition, by forgetting one another, and by our plain ignorance of our own, and others', limitations. We get the bit between our teeth, and we're haring off, leaving everyone else out of account, and effectively spoiling ourselves in the process.

#### Mary's Good Idea

I doubt if Mary of Bethany, who lives with Hurricane Martha, is really the lazybones her sister distressingly says she is. When you've lived with someone a long time, you know what they're like, and if you're wise, as Mary clearly is, you know about damage limitation. I would say that in the house at Bethany Mary has done what's necessary to catch the falling feast before it shatters disastrously. First, she has made the guest welcome, so that there will be at least one person who's calm and relaxed when thunder fills the sky. Second, she has created an oasis where peace can reign, despite the noises off in the kitchen. So when her angry sister erupts into view, she makes a soft landing amongst friends. Thirdly, she herself is really and truly peaceful, so that Jesus can point to her and say, *She's got the right idea; she's chosen the one thing that's really necessary*. I hope that Martha had the grace not to feel disparaged or demolished by these kind words; after all, Jesus loved Martha, and would have been glad to have her sit with them too; and love for a cook is a lot more precious than love for her cooking.

#### It's What You Are, Not What You Do

I think the Gospel reminds us that we are more important than our deeds, however good. It's a good story for this Sabbath day, when we should all be trying to rest from the treadmill, and welcome one another for what we are. We should look at our programme today, and make sure it includes the precious gift of welcoming one another, and resting together, and sharing gracefully in the joy of belonging to each other. *Fr Philip*