

### **Sunday, July 28, 2019.**

Morning. We recently heard in the Gospels how Martha complained that Mary left her to do all of the work around the house. Whether we live with family members or friends, we share a bathroom and a kitchen and the responsibilities involved in keeping those rooms clean. We also find ourselves sharing the responsibilities of preparing and serving meals, as well as cleaning up after the meals. Such is the all-too-familiar situation in which Saints Martha and Mary find themselves in tomorrow's Gospel reading.

Afternoon. Martha appeals to Jesus with the complaint that her sister has left her to do all the work. At a first reading, we might interpret Jesus as giving blanket permission for us to be excused from any and all responsibility in cleaning up. That cannot be. Chaos would result!

Evening. Nobody has to take out the garbage. Nobody has to clear the table or do the dishes. Nobody has to clean the bathroom. Society, as we know it, would break down, if these things are not done. There must be more to this story than simply concluding that Martha was doing all of the work while her sister Mary just sat around.

### **Monday, July 29, 2019.**

Morning. Let us give a deeper consideration to Jesus' response. "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." We wonder what is that better way? That Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to his words? Are we to interpret that we would similarly be free from the need to work and clean up if we sit in prayer and listen to the words of Jesus?

Afternoon. Let us look to the lives of those who spend many more hours a day in prayer than we ourselves do for the answer. Benedictine monks and nuns who commit themselves to a life of prayer, live by the following Latin motto, "Ora et Labora" – pray and work. So if they who pray hours and hours a day still need to work, then we cannot interpret that this Gospel reading is freeing us from our responsibility to work if we are good Christian believers who pray.

Evening. Is this Gospel reading making a broad and general statement that those who are committed to a contemplative life have chosen the better part, or the better way, over those of us who have chosen an active life? Does this mean that the cloistered, contemplative monk or nun has chosen a better life over those of us who do a more active ministry?

### **Tuesday, July 30, 2019.**

Morning. Are we — I, who writes these meditations, and you, who read them — second class citizens because we do not live in contemplative monasteries, *apart from the world*? I, as a priest, *live in the world* and minister to this local church of St Jude. You *live in the world*, married couples making sacrifices for one another, parents making sacrifices for their children, single people leading a disciplined life, a Christian life out in the world, that runs so counter-cultural to the lifestyle of a single person.

Afternoon. Any lifestyle, whether contemplative, active ministry, married, parenting, single, is found not in the ideal, abstraction of the lifestyle itself, but rather in our responding to Jesus by

accepting the vocation that he has in mind for us, and living it out fully. Since any of those callings takes work, nobody is excused from working. So what is this Gospel reading about?

Evening. Let us consider the frame of mind of Mary and Martha. Mary is the one who is focused wholeheartedly on what she is doing. On the other hand, Martha is NOT focused on what she is doing, but rather she is focused on what her sister is doing.

### **Wednesday, July 31, 2019.**

Morning. I myself grew up in a family of four children, close together in age. We were always complaining. “Mom, I’m doing everything and he’s doing nothing.” “Dad, how can you ask me to do that when she has not done anything all day long?” I was not focusing on what I was doing, but rather on what my siblings were not doing.

Afternoon. When I went off to school, we were forever comparing ourselves to one another and being ranked by the teachers. There was so much of an emphasis on focusing on what everybody else was doing that it became difficult for the individual student to calm down and focus on what he or she individually was supposed to be doing.

Evening. When I went off to the workplace, employees focused so much on what the other employees were doing and even, in the extreme, sabotaged the work of another employee, to make oneself look better. Rather than seeing one’s time in the workplace as an opportunity to focus on what one was doing and learn how to do a better job and thereby become a better employee, the focus was on sabotaging the work of and slandering those who did do a good job, so that one’s mediocre performance by comparison suddenly seemed better.

### **Thursday, August 1, 2019.**

Morning. In the Gospel passage, Mary is focusing on what she is doing. She is not concerned with complaining about what somebody else is doing. On the other hand, Martha is not completely focused on what she is doing. She has her eye on Mary and runs to Jesus to complain about Mary.

Afternoon. Let us understand Jesus’ words in the context of this interpretation as I paraphrase, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. You cannot focus on what you are doing because you are overly concerned with what your sister is and is not doing. Mary is focused on what she is doing and is not distracted by focusing on what you are doing. She has chosen the better part or the better way.” So let me not get distracted by focusing on what others are (or are not) doing. Rather let me focus wholeheartedly on what I am doing.

Evening. Now, I am not saying that we would not notice if somebody else is making an egregious mistake that will take down the entire world. Of course we would notice, and we would do something about it, out of the responsibility that we have as part of the human family. The take home message here is: How many times have I ended up severely reducing and cramping my own focus, my own productivity, my own level of enjoyment that comes from being fully involved in something, because I was more focused on what everybody else is doing?

**Friday, August 2, 2019.**

Morning. Let us imitate the focus and spirit of Mary in whatever we do, whether it is sitting at the feet of the Lord in prayer, or whether it is being busy, doing what needs to be done. Let us find the meaning of what we do as we carry out the vocation that the Lord has given to us, whether it is an active or a contemplative one. Let us embrace it wholeheartedly and keep our focus fixed on the Lord, rather than on everybody else.

Afternoon. A few days from now we will celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration. In anticipation of that event, let us spend the next few days considering the question: Do we attempt to tell Jesus the way things should be, or do we listen to him? If we do attempt to tell Jesus what to do, we are in good company. Early in his own spiritual journey, St Peter attempted to take charge and tell Jesus what should happen. (But let us not forget that later in his life, St Peter would listen and become one of the greatest followers of Jesus.)

Evening. In the Transfiguration (August 6), Jesus takes three of his apostles up the mountain to pray. There he transforms himself in a radiant, heavenly vision. The long-since deceased, and long-since departed from this world characters of Moses and the prophet Elijah accompany Jesus in the vision. Let us sit in awe of the great event that many of us meditate on every Thursday as we say the Luminous mysteries of the Rosary.

**Saturday August 3.**

Morning. Jesus reveals his own heavenly, divine, radiant glory to Peter. Jesus knows that things are going to get rough for Peter in the future. His faith is going to be tested. He is going to be tempted to deny that he even knows Jesus. Jesus wants to offer him this heavenly, divine vision, to strengthen him. That way when he goes back down the mountain and things do get tough, he can rely on the strength of having seen Jesus in all of his glory.

Afternoon. But St Peter does not stand in awe before the vision, as Jesus would have him do. He does not allow it to fill him with strength, as Jesus intends. Rather he takes charge and tells Jesus that he wants to make tents.

Evening. St Peter is a fisherman and all of a sudden he wants to become a tent maker? How many times has Jesus attempted to give us the grace and strength to do what he wants us to do? How many times have we not accepted what Jesus wants to give us, but rather told Jesus what we want to happen?

**Sunday August 4, 2019.**

Morning. With Peter's lack of cooperation, a cloud covers him and blocks out the vision. Elijah and Moses are gone and Jesus is no longer radiant. Peter has missed out on so much of what Jesus had intended for him. Sadly, he did not embrace the opportunity to spiritually strengthen himself. And without that spiritual strength, sadly, you know the story, he will and does eventually deny Jesus.

Afternoon. God the Father, our heavenly Father, sees right through Peter. He knows that Peter's error is that he wants to take charge. He wants to be the one who gives the instructions. He does not want to listen. God the Father says to Peter, "listen to him {him, of course being

Jesus}.” An echo of words spoken earlier on Jesus’ public ministry when the Blessed Virgin Mary said of Jesus, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Evening. There is a common theme in the Gospels. Listen to Jesus. Do what he says. How many times have I, like Peter, failed at this? How many times have I been the one to tell Jesus what I want to happen?

### **Monday, August 5, 2019.**

Morning. But that is not the end of the story. Peter would come around to become one of the greatest Saints in the history of the church. He would go on to give up his life, as a martyr, for the faith. He would go on to leave behind wonderful writing that is included as part of the Bible. He is the one after whom all of the Holy Fathers in our Church’s history have “I will follow in the footsteps of the great, holy Saint Peter.” He is the one after whom all Popes have followed, as leader of our church.

Afternoon. Peter’s story is a story of marvelous growth. It is a model for us all. It is inspirational. Most of us begin our relationship with Jesus as did St Peter. We begin with knowing what is best. We begin with telling Jesus what is best. At times I have even gone to extremes, as if the best thing to do is to say to Jesus, “Step aside, Jesus, and let me take care of this.”

Evening. After a few decades of coming up against our own human limitations, we realize that God is God and God really does know better. Then we abandon telling Jesus the way it should be. In our newfound spiritual maturity we enter into prayer and listen. We are now carrying the wishes of our Heavenly Father who said, “Listen to Jesus,” and the words of our spiritual mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, who said, “Do whatever Jesus tells us to do.”

### **Tuesday, August 6, 2019.**

Morning. I have many of the same weaknesses that Saint Peter had. The question is: will I allow grace to help me to overcome those weaknesses? Will those of us who now imitate St. Peter in his early fault of trying to take control and boss Jesus around... will we come around as did St. Peter and eventually turn ourselves over and listen to and do whatever Jesus tells us to do?

Afternoon. Today on the church’s calendar, we celebrate the Transfiguration. Let us sit in awe and wonder before that divine revelation and allow it to fill us with strength and hope. That way we will be strengthened to face adversity in the future.

Evening. “The face of Jesus changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions saw the glory of Jesus and the two men standing with him.”

### **Wednesday, August 7, 2019.**

Morning. This month of August includes days dedicated to Our Lady (Assumption and her Queenship), as well as days dedicated to Saints who had a strong devotion to her. Tradition tells

us Our Lady gave the Rosary to St Dominic during an apparition. Doing a google image search on “Our Lady gives Rosary to St Dominic” returns many beautiful scenes in the history of art.

Afternoon. Although all church historians are not in agreement about the origin of the Rosary prayer form as we know it today — owing to the fact that there is no record of the Rosary before St Dominic, and that the Rosary became popular in the lifetime of St Dominic — tradition suggests that he did indeed receive the Rosary directly from the Blessed Virgin during an apparition in 1214.

Evening. St Dominic was repeatedly asked to become a Bishop but steadfastly refused all attempts. He feared that the administrative responsibilities and burdens would prevent him from carrying out his mission to establish a religious order.

#### **Thursday, August 8, 2019.**

Morning. Eventually, Dominic was granted permission to form his own religious order. He was originally joined by six followers. The group followed a Rule of Life which included a strict routine of discipline, including prayer and penance. They also established a system of education. They often traveled the countryside to preach.

Afternoon. In 1217, Pope Honorius III dubbed Dominic and his followers “The Order of Preachers.” At this point, the band of now seventeen men spread out across Europe. New members began to appear in great numbers across the continent. In 1218, Pope Honorius III issued a papal decree, asking all clergy across Europe to support the Order of Preachers. He then asked Dominic to assist with a new mission.

Evening. The Pope asked Dominic to restore discipline to various religious orders. This began a period of travel that would continue for the rest of his life. He established written rules of life for religious to follow, as well as formal constitutions. In 1221, Dominic took ill with a fever. He exhorted his followers to keep a spirit of humility and charity, made a last confession, and then passed away at the young age of only 51. Pope Gregory IX canonized St. Dominic in the year 1234, and his feast day is August 8.

#### **Friday, August 9, 2019.**

Morning. Our readings of this coming Sunday ask us to take a long term view of life. The Gospel asks us to remain confident and excited and vigilant throughout our entire life. The second reading speaks of Abraham and Sarah waiting for an entire century!

Afternoon. Those of us who are students work on a 14 week semester model. Those of us who earn a living work within the 90 day business cycle. Let us take a long — a very long — deep breath and stretch out our concept of time. We are asked to remain vigilant through our entire life.

Evening. But how do we remain confident and enthusiastic and vigilant? What do we do when ever so frequently plans do not work out, and when infrequently everything blows up in our face? Let us look to those who have gone before us. Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden and had to figure out a new life for themselves, one now filled with sin and death.

**Saturday, August 10, 2019.**

Morning. Noah had to figure out how to build and load an ark with two of every kind of animal and keep things clean and smelling sweet for forty days. The Bible consists of countless stories of people who at best had their plans changed and at worst had their entire life blow up before them. The heroes of the Bible are those who looked to God's grace to keep them going.

Afternoon. They were asked to dig down and, in faith, carry on optimistically and with vigilance for the long haul. So we are called.

Evening. Let us hear Jesus' words of today's Gospel reading. Blessed are we, his servants, who remain faithful in carrying out the responsibilities that he has given to us. Sure, in the excitement of first realizing something of Jesus' love for us and what he wants of us, it is easy. But how do we carry on through fifteen and thirty and sixty years?

**Sunday, August 11, 2019.**

Morning. When the plans do not work... When the plans have to change... When everything blows up in our face... the temptation is there for us to throw up our hands and walk away. Our responsibility calls us to recommit to God's plan for us, recommit to ourselves, and to recommit to those who are dependent on us. We, with our and short-lived attention span, need to embrace the next years and decades of carrying out our responsibilities with optimism and hope and to do so vigilantly.

Afternoon. Let us now look to the upcoming solemnity of the Assumption. The Blessed Virgin Mary was assumed up into heaven, body and soul. What was so special about her that her body was not left behind, as happens when we die? Let us take the next few days discovering the answer. God the Father could have chosen to have Jesus come to earth in any way that he wanted. For example, as a fully grown man. But Jesus was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Evening. Although he was and is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and God himself, Jesus came into this world as any other baby does, born to his or her mother, and completely dependent on parents (in this case Our Lady and Saint Joseph).

**Monday, August 12, 2019.**

Morning. Years before Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary, when Mary herself was conceived in the womb of her own mother, Mary was conceived without original sin, an act known as the Immaculate Conception.

Afternoon. Our Lady was created in this special way, without original sin, because her very body would contain God himself, and it would not be fitting for Jesus to be contained in the body of a sinful mother.

Evening. There was and is definitely something special and different about the body of the Blessed Virgin. Hers was created without original sin. Hers did not sin. Whereas we were born with original sin, and throughout our lives, our eyes and our hands cause us to sin, our legs take us to places where we would sin.

**Tuesday, August 13, 2019.**

Morning. Because there was and is something special about her body, when her earthly life came to an end, rather than have her body and soul separate, as do ours, she was simply assumed up into heaven, body and soul still complete. The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, body and soul, into heaven, flows naturally out of the fact that she was created in a special way because she would hold God himself in her womb.

Afternoon. Mother and Son. If we want to understand something of the relationship between Jesus (the founder of our faith) and Mary (the most perfect disciple of our faith), let us see them as mother and son. One of the beautiful things that comes out of a focus and consideration of this day is that of family, and in particular mother and child. Our Lady was assumed up into heaven because she was the mother of Jesus.

Evening. In her Assumption, the Blessed Virgin was assumed up into heaven to where her son, not too many years before, had ascended. Let us put on our grammar hats and note the passive and active voice. Mary was assumed. Jesus ascended.

**Wednesday, August 14, 2019.**

Morning. Yes, there certainly was and is something special about Mary. But she was still human, just like you and me, and therefore did not have the power to get to heaven on her own. She had to be lifted up by God (assumed) into heaven. Passive voice. Jesus, on the other hand, is God himself and has the power to ascend up into heaven. He does not need anybody to pull him up into heaven. He gets there on his own. Active voice.

Afternoon. In the action of the Assumption, we find Mother and Child once again reunited. Not unlike in our own lives. When, provided that all parties involved live out a good and holy life and are invited into heaven, we are reunited with those of our family who had predeceased us.

Evening. Upon parents bringing a child into this world, most likely they will live very closely together for perhaps two decades, when the child will most likely set off for a job or college and live elsewhere. Hopefully, it is not an abrupt and final separation, but rather one that is marked with periodic face-to-face visits and other forms of communication. A new and different relationship? Yes. But also one that does not cease.

**Thursday, August 15, 2019.**

Morning. If both parents and child live long enough, we often find the adult child caring for the aging parents. Eventually, whether they live long enough or not, we find some pre-deceasing the others, some in heaven and some remaining on earth, until they are finally reunited in heaven — again provided that all have lived a just and holy life and have been invited into heaven.

Afternoon. As we celebrate the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, body and soul into heaven, I ask that we do not consider her apart from her son, Jesus. In his ascension into heaven, Jesus left his mother behind, here on earth. In her assumption into heaven, Our Lady is reunited for the rest of eternity with her son Jesus.

Evening. Regardless of whether our own parent-child relationships were ideal, let us do our best to model our own parent-child relationships on love and to the best of our ability somehow mirror the very basis upon which our faith was formed, Jesus being the founder, and Our Lady being the perfect disciple.

**Friday, August 16, 2019.**

Morning. This month we celebrate St Maximillian Kolbe and I ask that we look to the example of his devotion to the Blessed Virgin. In his youth, in a vision, Our Lady showed him two crowns, one white and one red. He would wear the white crown and remain pure and undivided in his love for God and the Blessed Virgin. He would also wear the red crown of a martyr.

Afternoon. In his young adulthood, he became a Franciscan and made a devotion to the Blessed Virgin a center of his prayer life.

Evening. In a concentration camp during World War II, when a man, whom St Maximillian Kolbe knew to be the father of many children, was to be put to death, Maximillian volunteered to take his place and so died on August 14, the eve of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. Let us look to the devotion that this great Saint had to the Blessed Virgin, as an example for our own devotion.

**Saturday, August 17, 2019.**

Morning. Let us also look to the great Saint Bernard and his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Bernard writes (*In Praise of the Virgin Mother*) how we all were so very dependent on her response to the Angel when asked if she would become the mother of Jesus, and how we all benefitted by her saying yes.

Afternoon. He emphasized the role of Mary in relation to her son and distribution of graces with his words, "God has willed that we should have nothing which would not pass through the hands of Mary."

Evening. A bit of trivia. At one point in the Divine Comedy, Dante has St Bernard act as a guide through Paradise, a journey that Bernard begins by invoking the Blessed Virgin in prayer. The month of August includes many days on which we remember saints who had strong devotions to the Blessed Virgin. Let us model our own devotion to the Blessed Virgin after these great saints.