

“Jesus entered a village where a woman named Martha, welcomed him.”

Today's Gospel: LK 10:38

Is not the word “Welcome!” one of the great words of our language? It is also a favorite word of Scripture; we encounter it both in today's first reading, as well as in today's Gospel.

In the picture above, Fitz and Rosemary are welcomed at a “safe house,” a warm place of hospitality by John and Anna O'Connor and their dog Finley, for Balderdash.

Bachelors like me need “safe houses” where they can escape from bachelor pads.

When I was “confined” to the all male St. Paul Seminary, Rosemary's house was a safe house for me and many Omaha seminarians on our infrequent days off.

And Jesus also was a bachelor!

So Jesus needed a safe house, not only to get away from enemies who wished him harm, but also to gain a respite from his often quarrelling disciples. Such a home was the safe house belonging to his dear friends Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

(Interestingly, recently Pope Francis has opted not to live in an isolated, bachelor pad—papal apartment, but rather to live with friends.)

(One Irish comedian used to say, “Jesus had to be Irish because like so many Irishmen, he was 33, living with his mother, and unemployed!”)

So in today’s Gospel, Martha comes out to greet Jesus and then gets busy fixing a meal. Mary on the other hand, sits around enjoying the presence of Jesus. Thus she is considered a “contemplative.”

My dog Buddy is a “contemplative.” He goes out in the morning, stands still, sniffs the breeze, and looks all around, enjoying the scenery. Only after this, does he do his business.

So in the Gospel, Martha comes out to greet Jesus and then gets very busy preparing a good meal. But Martha gets a little peeved because Mary is sitting around, just enjoying Jesus. She complains. Jesus says: “Mary has chosen the better part.” But notice, he does not tell Martha to quit cooking. He was looking forward to one of her good meals. Jesus always loved a good meal.

But he does say to Martha: “You are ANXIOUS about many things.” It was not her cooking he critiqued; it was her anxiety

I think Martha has too often got a bad rap by supposedly being inferior to Mary. Not so. Jesus needed BOTH Martha and Mary. It is not either/or. It is both/and. We are at our best when we offer hospitality like both Martha and Mary at the same time; we are to be gracious and not anxious.

The theme of hospitality is a constant Judeo Christian biblical theme. Today the American Catholic Bishops are for comprehensive immigration reform based on scriptural hospitality which is not some adjunct but at the heart of the Christian ethos. “Welcome the stranger!” And this includes the immigrant whether documented or not—is expressed especially in today’s first reading and so many others.

Saint Benedict in his rule decreed: “Receive each guest as Christ.”

