

— / —
M A R T H A (from the Hebrew, Ruler of the House)

Yes, Lord! Yet some must serve!
Not all with tranquil heart,
Even at Thy dear feet,
Wrapped in devotion sweet,
May sit apart!

Yes, Lord! Yet some must bear
The burden of the day,
Its labor and its heat,
While others at Thy feet
May muse and pray.

Yes, Lord! Yet man must earn
And woman bake the bread;
And some must watch and wake
Early for others' sake,
Who pray instead!

Yes, Lord! Yet some must do
Life's daily task - work; some
Who fain would sing must toil
Amid earth's dust and moil,
While lips are dumb!

Yes, Lord! Yet even Thou
Hast need of earthly care;
I bring the bread and wine
To Thee, a guest divine -
Be this my prayer!

Martha appears with Jesus in 3 vivid scenes in the Gospels; at a family meal, in the house of mourning, and at a banquet. In all 3 she reveals the same sure and consistent traits - busy, practical, efficient, loyal. She is the head of the household - either elder maiden sister, or more probably a widowed sister - her husband Simon, known as the leper, being deceased.

The Gospel of Luke (10:38) records that one day during Jesus' journeyings Martha welcomed Him into her house and then became engrossed in preparing an elaborate meal in token of welcome. Missing the aid of her sister Mary who was sitting in rapt attention at His feet, she besought Jesus, in a moment of flustered impatience, to request Mary to come to her aid. Too much can easily be made of this fleeting fit of temper, which Jesus Himself mildly and half playfully rebuked. By this episode Luke no doubt meant to reveal the tender and familiar footing which the Master had so quickly and naturally attained in that friendly and hospitable home. In His superbly tactful way Jesus recog-

nized the loyalty of each of these sisters, as expressed in her own way. Mary's attention was making His stay pleasant, and Martha's was making it comfortable.

The Gospel of John (11:1) shows the Bethany home of glad hospitality transformed to the home of anxiety and then deepened in tone to the home of sorrow. The sisters' urgent message to Jesus concerning their brother's illness brought no word of response.

As day followed day, anxiety sank to doubt and doubt plummeted to despair. Jesus' seeming neglect must have grieved them deeply. They probably talked of it together again and again during those terrible days of waiting, as still no message came. For the first word of greeting on the lips of each is the same, when He at long last arrived: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died!"

Jesus, too, was human enough to be deeply moved, both by their evidently injured feelings and even more by Martha's still trustful faith: "But I know that even now whatever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee". That is the heart and core of Christian faith and prayer, is it not? In those tense moments Jesus must have carried a heavy burden of emotion.

The respective temperaments of these sisters run true to form in this crucial hour. Mary, who had sat at His feet on that happier day, is now shut in her room a sunken heap of weeping misery and despair. Martha, who no doubt loved as deeply and felt the loss as keenly, hastens to meet Him, sends for Mary to come and meet Him too, and leads the company to the place of burial.

Lord Tennyson thus portrays the scene of resurrection and restoration - Could not what he says of Mary be as truly said of Martha?

Her eyes are homes of silent prayer,
Nor other thought her mind admits
But he was dead, and there he sits,
And He who brought him back is there.

Then one deep love doth supersede
All other, when her ardent gaze
Robes from the living brother's face,
And rests upon the Life Indeed.

A few days passed. Jesus was marked for death by His enemies. His following had shrunk to a mere handful of puzzled and fearful disciples. Martha again opened that same Bethany home to make Him guest of honor at a reception that was meant to seal the loyalty of His friends who might have the courage to come. Whatever persecution might

ensue from this splendid gesture of devotion to a waning cause, Martha with her brother and sister was ready to face.

For 2 or 3 nights of His last week on earth, He was again a guest in their home, coming out the 2 mile journey from Jerusalem at the day's end. Concerning the conspicuous absence of the names of Martha and Mary and Lazarus from the final scenes of trial, crucifixion and burial, there is one plausible explanation, and I think but one: They are out at Bethany, caring for the needs of His stricken mother and His other distraught relatives and frightened disciples - doing loyally and trustfully the task nearest at hand.

A legend from the Middle Ages keeps alive the Church's interest in this family of which Martha was the head. In the swift persecution that followed the scenes of Resurrection and Ascension, Martha, with Mary and Lazarus, was banished from home, set adrift on the Mediterranean, came at last to Marseilles, preached and founded churches at Marseilles, Aix and Provence. But Holy Writ is enough in itself to enshrine this noble woman in our hearts as one who, in her own busy, thorough, efficient performance of the daily round of duty, walked by faith and not by sight.