

5th Sunday of Lent—Year B with yr. A readings by Kevin Williams
March 17-18, 2018 John 11:1-41

“Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God.” Wait a minute! Isn’t this the same Martha who had complained to Jesus that her sister Mary was being lazy and was leaving all the work for her? Yes, it is. But here she is, making such a bold statement of faith in Jesus! It certainly seems as though some sort of change has taken place in Martha’s life.

Martha is an interesting person to take a look at. Especially during this time of Lent when we stress the need for more prayer, fasting and charity. You see, what the church is really calling each of us to is transformation. And in Martha we see a powerful example of that kind of transformation taking place. Her beautiful proclamation of faith is one of the most profound statements in Scripture. But poor ole Martha seems to get the short end of the stick when it comes to how people generally think of her. When we think of Martha and her sister Mary, we tend to regard Martha as the famous “anxious worrier”, while we think of Mary as the one who sat listening intently to Jesus. Jesus had told Martha that Mary had chosen the better part because Martha was too preoccupied with “many things.” But then something started to happen to Martha. She must’ve thought about

what Jesus had said to her. And she started to let His words settle into her heart. Martha was starting to experience conversion.

She was learning to spend less time being worried and upset about those “many things”. She was learning to listen to Jesus with an open mind and heart and she was growing in her faith.

Martha was apparently quite moved by what she heard Jesus say. His parables and His explanations of who He was and why He had come to earth must have had quite an impact on her. How else could she have known that God would do whatever Jesus asked of Him? How else could she have made such a statement of faith in the midst of her grief over her brother’s death? What a beautiful story of transformation we see in Martha. (pause)

Now, in the story of Martha’s spiritual growth, there is a message of hope for us. I think we all have a bit of Martha in us. We can get overwhelmed with worry and anxiety about all of our responsibilities.

We do have a lot of things to do and those things can start to overwhelm us and pull us away from God’s presence. Fortunately, Martha started to sense that there was something better in life and she started to seek that for herself. Guess what this means for us. If Martha could change, so can we. All it takes is the decision to set

aside time for Jesus each day. Yes, we need to speak to Jesus every day, but more importantly, we need to listen to Him. Jesus wants that everyday. He wants to talk to us and He wants to hear from us.

Now, we have to be careful of something as we look at Martha. One of the dangers we might face is to think that Martha was different from us because she knew Jesus face to face. But a lot of people had that chance and many of them totally rejected Jesus. We have to remember that. So we really can't delude ourselves into thinking that Martha was different from us. Martha didn't do anything we can't do. All she did was make the decision to be open to what Jesus was telling her. She humbled herself to a wisdom greater than her own. It's quite amazing when you think about it. Martha underwent quite a transformation. She went from being anxious, worried and agitated at a simple dinner party – I mean this wasn't a big, elaborate banquet – to being able to handle something as difficult as her own brother's death. She was even able to let that event stretch her faith in Jesus. Having had this chance to reflect on the life of Martha, I see that she has a lot to teach us about how to respond to Jesus. In fact, she might say words like this to us, "Don't just listen to the words of

Jesus. Let His words penetrate you and change you from the inside out.”

This is the kind of change God wants to see in all of us. Every single one of us can undergo a powerful transformation when we let the power of Jesus work in our minds, our hearts, our souls.

You know, it’s ironic in a way. Sometimes we hear people say, Oh! people can’t change! Well, I’m here to tell you that isn’t true. People **can** change. If we say they can’t, then we are limiting the power of God. We are saying, in effect, that God can’t do miracles. We are saying that the grace of God has no effect. And I don’t believe that. I’ve seen too much of that evidence in my own life. I went from being someone who had no faith in Jesus or any desire to know Him, to being someone who actively wants to grow in his relationship with Jesus. So, if you tell me that people can’t change, I’ll tell you I know they can. I’ve been there. I’ve been changed and I’m still being changed. And I’m very thankful for that. It’s a much better place than where I used to be!

Now let’s look at this from another perspective. I think we all know people that are difficult to deal with. Sometimes we wonder if they will ever change. Well, with today’s story as an example, Jesus says

they can change. So instead of condemning those people, we need to be doing something. Like what? Praying for them! God wants to hear that we care enough to pray for them. But not just once. We need to pray for them constantly and with persistence. When we do that, we are actually loving those people and that means more to God than anything else. We also need to look at the people in our lives that we judge can't change because we hold a grudge against them. You know what I mean. If there is somebody we haven't forgiven because of something they've done to hurt us, we tend to put them into that category of people who can't change. We need to move past that barrier of unforgiveness.

I've talked a lot about change today. Martha changed. We can change. The troublesome people in our lives can change.

I think it's good to reflect on how God has changed us to this point in our lives. The next time you are in prayer, I invite you to think about the situations you've been through where you felt the Lord prompting you to trust Him in a more meaningful way.

Then join Martha, in her proclamation of faith. Celebrate the Messiah, who has come into the world to raise us all from death to new life! Amen.