

**16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C**  
**July 18, 2010**

**Readings: Genesis 18:1-10a; Colossians 1:24-28; Luke 10:38-42**

**Know, Love, and Then Serve**

There are some of you here of my generation or older who probably still remember the old Baltimore Catechism. It was set up as a long series of questions and answers which we were supposed to memorize as part of our religious education back in grade school. Back then we were confirmed when we were in fourth grade. The nuns motivated us to learn our answers by telling us that when the bishop came for confirmation, he could ask anyone of us for a response to one of the questions we were supposed to know. Not knowing the answer would not only be an embarrassment, but there was also the threat that the bishop might not confirm you as well.

Now, almost 50 years later, I don't remember too many of the answers to the questions from the catechism. Maybe it wasn't such a good learning technique. But for some reason one sticks in my mind. I looked it up; it's question #150: "*Why did God make you?*" And the answer of course is: "*God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next.*" I'm sure it sounds familiar to some of you. The next question, #151, gives us the key to our gospel story about Martha and Mary. It asks: "*Why is it necessary to know God?*" And the answer given in the catechism is: "*It is necessary to know God because without knowing Him we cannot love Him; and without loving Him we cannot be saved. We should know Him because He is infinitely true; love Him because He is infinitely beautiful; and serve Him because He is infinitely good.*"

We cannot love what we do not know. And without love we cannot serve with the proper disposition. Eight years ago I went on a two-week mission trip to Bolivia with my wife and two of our daughters to help with the construction of a school just outside the capital city of La Paz. This stole I am wearing today is a souvenir from that trip; made from some of the traditional fabrics of the area. Our mission group consisted mainly of college students but there were also several women, and then there was me. We were introduced to the four-man local construction team and put at their disposal for them to direct us in the work that needed to be done. There were 110# (50 kilogram) bags of cement to move along with many wheelbarrow loads of sand and many buckets of water. There were forms to build, concrete to mix by hand and distribute by the bucket loads to form the floors. There were bricks to unload from the truck and then to lay carefully to form the walls of the school. There was so much work to do, and so little time. I was motivated to get as much done as possible during our two-week stint and was perturbed when some of the girls wandered off with the kids to play games and sing songs, or when some of the women went and visited with some of the women of the neighborhood, or when some of the guys went off down the road to have a few beers with some of the workers. It didn't seem quite right or fair.

But God has a sense of humor and used it to send me a message. You see, while we on the trip, everyone kept their individual journals, but we also kept a group-wide journal or log book. Each day a different person was responsible for making that day's entry. I was assigned journaling duties on July 29. As I started that day, I opened my breviary to say my morning prayers and only then realized that July 29 was the feast day, the memorial, of Martha, the main character in today's gospel story. It was quite humbling, and my journal reflection for that day

caused me to realize how much I was acting like Martha, and how most of the rest of the mission group had chosen the better part.

For the most part, the college students and the women had set out to get to know the people that we came to serve. They saw the importance of building relationships and not just building a school house. I tried to serve without knowing and loving the people; acting out of a sense of obligation and duty. And I ended up grumbling and feeling sorry for myself like Martha.

Know, love, and then serve. It's important to keep our priorities in perspective and to keep a balance between our service and our prayer life. We need to spend time knowing God better through prayer and reading scriptures. And we need to spend time serving Him by serving our neighbors. If we spend time only in prayer conversing with God but then do not live out a life of charity, we need to question whether we truly know God at all. If we go out and try to serve our sister and brothers without first developing a prayerful relationship with God, we will become misguided and will burn out. We cannot sustain a life of service that is motivated by obligation. We need to be motivated by unselfish love and that can only be cultivated by a relationship with God.

Relationships are important, both with God and with our neighbor. And they come first before service. A hug, a kind word, simply the acknowledgement of another's worth and value as a human being, is often more valuable than material gifts and service.

Let us all strive to get to know and love both God and our neighbors here on earth. Service will follow naturally. It will not be a burden as it was for Martha, and as it was for me.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**