

HOW TO IMPRESS JESUS!

Today's Text: Lk 10: 38- 42

Extracts:

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things, but one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" [Lk 10: 38-42]

Francisco Everado Oliveira Silva is a 45-year old illiterate clown in Brazil, better known by his clown name, Tiririca.¹ In the presidential and congressional elections held on Sunday, 3 October 2010, he contested for a congressional seat in Sao Paulo, the country's most populous state. Public prosecutors tried to stop his candidacy in court on account of his illiteracy but failed. In his campaign ads, he said, "What does a congressman do? The truth is I don't know, but vote for me and I'll tell you." His campaign slogan was, "It can't get worse!" In the election, he won by 1.3 million votes which was more than double the votes of the second-placed candidate!

How was an illiterate able to win against all the elite candidates? It was because he impressed the disillusioned voters who were tired of electing congressmen who behaved like clowns. They decided to elect a real clown for a change! In like manner, many of us are working hard to impress Jesus but we are surprised that He can easily see through our hypocrisy. How can we avoid such a label in our relationship with Him? In this week's study, Jesus visited two sisters. Both received Him, but while one entertained Him, the other listened to Him. Which of them impressed Him? Let us find out!

¹ Based on "No jokes! Illiterate clown triumphs in election,"

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/39495001/ns/world_news-americas/?GT1=43001#; Oct. 4, 2010

1. Background: Martha tries to impress Jesus!

How would you receive an unexpected visitor to your house? Ordinarily, your response would depend on your relationship with him or her before that visit. If there was none, you would be very cautious, reading the visitor like a dangerous device so as to know whether s(he) was a friend or foe. If you already had a relationship with them, you might be able and willing to hide the inconvenience that such a visit was going to cause you. However, in some cases, there could be a cultural response that you could hide under. For example, Abraham [Gen. 18: 1-5] and his nephew, Lot [Gen. 19: 1-3] gladly welcomed strangers who turned out to be the Lord and/or angels. In the West, without an appointment or a phone call to announce your imminent visit, you can be sure that you would find a locked door on your arrival!

In this week's Bible story, the meeting between Jesus and Martha and her sister, Mary, was a chance visit. We are told "it *happened*" that Jesus and His entourage "entered a *certain village*" and met "a *certain woman* named Martha" [Lk 10: 38]. The time, the place and the host were all by chance. Knowing this is helpful to enable us to appreciate that Martha was showing her true nature in the way she hosted Jesus. In the absence of any contradictory story in the Bible, we can assume that these sisters were the same as those of Lazarus that Jesus raised from the dead in the town of Bethany [Jn 11: 1-2]. That suggests that a closer relationship developed between Jesus and Martha's family after this first chance meeting.

We are in a similar situation. We do not know when, where or how Jesus will come to visit us but He will find us in settings where we cannot pretend or be hypocritical. For example, when Philip introduced Nathanael to Jesus, he was pretending to be what he was not. Jesus said to him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit!" Surprised, Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you" [Jn 1: 45-48]. Therefore, as in the case of Martha's family, we would love to have a close relationship with Him after an unexpected close encounter. So, you had better sit up to learn something from this week's study that will help you to receive Him the way He wants, not the way you think. There lies the key to impressing Him.

How did Martha and his sister, Mary, receive Jesus and which of them impressed Him? Let us pay attention to the development of the story:

a) *Martha welcomed Jesus into her house*

In spite of the chance meeting, we are told that "*Martha welcomed Him into her house*" [Lk 10: 38]. That made Martha the chief hostess and it suggests that her younger sister, Mary, lived with her. In an African setting, Martha would sit with the guest while Mary would be the errand

girl. Mary would be the one to bring the drinks and prepare the food while Martha would keep the visitor company and make Him “feel at home.” That is similar to what happened when the Lord and two angels visited Abraham (then known as Abram). It was his wife, then Sarai, who prepared the food while he kept the visitors company and discussed with the Lord [**Gen. 18: 3-9**]. But that is not what we read in Martha’s case. Both in this story and at the (future) dinner where Lazarus stayed on the high table with Jesus, it was Martha that served [**Lk 10: 40; Jn 12: 2**]. Therefore, on the surface, it would look as if Mary was a “spoilt brat” who had not been raised to take part in domestic chores! That is the impression that I would have if I were the visitor!

b) *But it was Martha that was distracted!*

We are told that Martha had a sister called Mary “who *also sat* at Jesus’ feet and heard His word (but) Martha was distracted with much serving” [**Lk 10: 39-40**]. The use of “also” suggests that both Martha and her sister, Mary, sat at the feet of Jesus to hear His word. The difference, however, was that Martha excused herself every now and then to perform chores associated with serving, such as cooking or bringing more drinks. Mary, on the other hand, stayed and listened without any interruption.

It is quite understandable that Martha’s intention was to be a good hostess. She was anxious to impress Jesus. We can easily find ourselves in a similar situation. During a worship service in your church, how do you spend the time? If you are like Martha, you will slip in and out of concentrating on the service to make sure that everything is going well. You may be an usher or the choir master or the video recorder of your pastor’s sermon. You may be in charge of keeping the children in check or making sure that toilet supplies are in place. In all likelihood, you may find yourself distracted from the day’s worship. Yet, at the end of the service, you may beat your chest in satisfaction that you have had a great worship!

c) *And it was Mary that impressed Jesus!*

Martha complained about her sister to Jesus, saying, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me” [**v. 40**]. Martha was frustrated. Why should she be the only one serving? Was it right for Jesus to ‘encourage’ Mary’s wayward behaviour? Martha was angry! So would most of us. Can you imagine your church hosting the head of your denomination and all the women are supposed to be cooking? Instead of joining you to cook, some of the women are glued to their seats listening to the visitor’s sermon. You would certainly be furious. You would confront your local pastor or priest and upbraid him for condoning irresponsible conduct!

In His response, Jesus called Martha's name twice, saying, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things" [v. 41]. What does that suggest? When people are talking without listening, you try to calm them down by either calling their names or saying, "listen," several times. Martha seemed to have more on her mind than the Lord's visit. For example, her younger sister, Mary, might have seemed more inclined to matters of the kingdom of God than getting ahead in the world. Martha might be having troubles elsewhere also, including her social and business life. What if she had an appointment elsewhere at the time that Jesus showed up unexpectedly? Without telephone access at the time, how could she convey to the other party why she had not shown up? We can also speculate about her brother, Lazarus' health. Later, we know that he fell ill and died [Jn 11: 3]. Martha had so much to worry about. She was pressed, busy, complaining and irritable, and she took it out on her sister and their august Visitor.

But Jesus had an answer for her. Mary, her younger sister, *knew* one thing that was needed and she had chosen "that good part" that would not "be taken away from her" [Lk 10: 42]. In other words, *Mary was actually the one that had impressed Jesus. She knew what was needed (the word of God) and she gave it top priority. For that, she impressed Jesus.* That is the challenge thrown at us in this week's study.

2. So you want to impress Jesus?

Most believers have the zeal for a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. They want to do His will in everything. However, how can you do the will of Him that you do not understand? Jesus has said, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" [Lk 6: 46]. Therefore, you need to pay attention to how He says that you can impress Him. From this week's study, the following information is useful:

a) *Jesus is the host, not the guest!*

Martha's problem was to see herself as hosting Jesus. So, she did what she *believed* would impress her guest. Yet, when there was a dispute among the disciples over which of them should be considered the greatest, Jesus replied [Lk 22: 24-27]:

*For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet **I am among you as the One who serves.***

Take the example of the resurrected Christ that appeared to Peter and his fishing partners, Thomas, Nathanael, James and John, by the Sea of Tiberias (also known as the Sea of Galilee). They had fished all night and

caught nothing. In the morning, they saw a man standing by the shore but they did not as yet recognize Him as Jesus. He asked them if they had any food and they replied in the negative. At His command, they cast their net on the right side of the boat and they caught a multitude of fish. Then, they recognized Him as the Lord. But the remarkable story here is that by the time they brought some of the fish that they had caught ashore, they “saw a fire of coals there and fish laid on it and bread.” Jesus said to them, “Come and eat breakfast” [Jn 21: 1-12]. He played the host who had already prepared breakfast for His disciples! Having served them, they had no choice but to listen to what He had to tell Peter about his future [vv. 15-18].

You did not choose Jesus but He chose you and ordained you to bear fruits [Jn 15: 16]. Therefore, as your host, Jesus knows what you need and how to provide it. That was why He came in flesh to die in our place and show us the way to His kingdom. That was the good news that He was sharing with Mary while her sister was busy serving for man does not only live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God [Matt. 4: 4]. Mary was the Lord’s guest and so should you!

b) *As guest, you do not have to do anything!*

Mary sat at the feet of Jesus, doing nothing but listening! Jesus has said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” [Jn 6: 63]. The kingdom of God that the Lord shared with Mary is not about food and drinks but about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit [Rom. 14: 17]. Therefore, Mary was being fed the food of salvation which you can only obtain by grace, not by works. It is the gift of God [Eph. 2: 8-9]. That was why Jesus told Martha that Mary, her younger sister, had chosen the one thing that is needed that nobody can take away from her [Lk 10: 42].

Remarkably, even when believers profess that they have been saved by grace, you still see them behaving as if their “good works” are what will save them. They get contaminated by practices in other religions that do not accept Jesus as the Son of God that has died for the sins of the world. Let us make it quite clear. No one can claim to know God unless the one who has come from Him [Jn 3: 13] because God is invisible. So, who should know God better: Jesus who came from Him or philosophers and scientists who do not even know themselves, not to talk of God? What chances do you want to take?

c) *So, you can only impress Him if you let Him feed you!*

Mary knew her priority and chose it. She stayed at the feet of Jesus and never stepped away like her sister Martha to be distracted. Jesus has said,

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” [Matt. 6: 33]. He adds, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him” [Jn 14: 24].

From the forgoing, we can conclude that the Martha model assumes to know how to impress Jesus. It does not and cannot work because if Jesus were hungry, He would not tell you because the world is His and all its fullness [Ps. 50: 12; Ps. 24: 1]. In the Mary model, on the other hand, Jesus is the host and you are the guest. As the bread of life, He will serve you His flesh and blood for “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you,” and he who eats His flesh and drinks His blood abides in Him and He in him [Jn 6: 48, 53-56]. So, only those who relate to Jesus as Mary did can impress Him.

3. Conclusion: To listen to Jesus is to totally obey Him!

In real life, the *Martha model* is more attractive to most of us because it puts us in charge of our affairs. We try to impress others on our terms and turf- to show off what we are or have. As we have seen in this week’s study, you cannot impress Jesus that way. He is the Lord of hosts [Is. 6: 3; Rev. 4: 8], not of guests! You can only impress Him if you hear His voice [Jn 10: 27]. That is the *Mary model*. To listen to Jesus is to listen to God, His Father, because Jesus speaks what His Father tells Him [Jn 12: 49] and He is the Word of God made flesh [Jn 1: 14].

Jesus is saying to you this moment, “Listen! Listen!” That means that you should listen to Him, hear what He is telling you and go and do it. If you do that, then you have impressed Him. There is no other way out!