

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Oct 10th 2017

“Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.” (Luke 10: 42)

Growing up, my parents had a small, decorative, wooden box sitting beside a chair in our living room. This carved container, not much larger than an avocado, depicted an orchestra with its members packed in like sardines; the violinist’s bow stuck in the eye of the clarinetist and each other musician imposing in some way on the other. Amidst this chaos was an exasperated conductor who had failed to garner the attention of anyone. No one was oriented so as to see and follow the conductor.

Comical though this small piece of carved art may be, it came to my mind upon reflecting on today’s readings, each of which appears to touch upon the question of where we orient our attention and focus in our lives, much like the orchestra. The city of Nineveh faced sure destruction until its inhabitants repented and reoriented their lives away from evil and toward God. Psalm 130 similarly encourages orienting ourselves toward God: “For with the Lord is kindness and with him is plenteous redemption” (emphasis added).

Then comes the story of Mary and Martha. This passage seems to separate itself from the others in that while the others seem to contrast good and evil, neither Mary nor Martha seems to be doing anything remotely evil. In fact, it seems that Martha, perhaps, is the more virtuous in her rush to serve Jesus upon his arrival. Jesus, however, applauds Mary’s decision instead. Why? Perhaps it is because Mary’s decision to sit at Jesus’ feet is precisely the orientation God asks of us. Saint Ignatius discovered this very lesson upon his own conversation away from vanity and the pleasures of the world and toward God.

How can we, like Mary, fix our gaze on Jesus ever more intently and sit at his feet despite life’s distractions? How might simply being with Jesus – as a starting point – provide us with a right orientation in our lives and in the tasks before us? Just as an orchestra must follow a conductor, so too may we each and all choose the “better part” that Mary chose.

Scott McClure-Creighton University's Magis Catholic Teacher Corps