

Martha, the Worry and the Welcome

- a way of liberation

Of course I worry and fret! There is no other way. Yesterday He himself told me to stop, but how can I understand Him?

"Martha, Martha," he told me, when I complained about my sister Mary, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41-41)

How will the housework get done, if some of us don't worry and fret? The cooking, the cleaning... The Kingdom? Didn't He himself tell us that the Kingdom was among us, and inside us? So, as I figure it, the Kingdom must have some of its roots in this world. So isn't it by working in this world that we have to prepare for the Kingdom? The priests and scribes at the Temple told us that the whole world must be changed.

And our meetings — doesn't someone have to be preoccupied with organising them properly? And the travellers who come from afar — doesn't someone have to worry about giving them proper hospitality? And the poor, who is to take care of them? Doesn't someone have to be concerned with counting the purse for the morrow? And what will we do if the oil or the flour is almost used up?

I am weary. Let me open this door ajar, then I'll lay myself down here in the corner for a little while...

In the stillness of this summer afternoon, the birds are still chattering, who knows about what. And I can hear a dog barking in the sun, behind the hill; you can hardly hear it. And a donkey is braying, far away.

I can hear a soft voice:

"Martha, Martha — now you've managed to start worrying even about worry itself!"

That's true.

"The Lord is here. Now! As He told you, only one thing is necessary. Be with Him. Even when you cannot see Him. And Eternal life is already here, Martha, and your worrying and fretting is preventing you from living it."

I rise to my feet. Again I am pacing round and round the room.

But who would cook and serve at table?

"Embrace the Lord, Martha."

But who would cook —? I feel like a wild rabbit, cornered, about to be caught.

Who are you? (I know.)

"I am your own mind, Martha, but without the worrying and the fretting. It is you who will cook. And Mary too, when cooking is needed. For many types of work, your attention is needed, but hardly your thought, let alone your worrying."

But my thoughts are needed — of course they are needed!

"Whenever you are modifying a recipe, or counting the purse, yes, you need your thoughts. But be careful! Thoughts may quickly turn into worrying, and of that there is no need."

I am observing the voices in my own mind.

I am listening, watching, totally present. Without any blaming of myself or others. Here is the Still Point. It's like when, unnoticed, I sometimes peek through the doorway at my little nephews and nieces engrossed in their play and in their little disputes.

A little more time has passed. The worrying is coming back" It's coming back to take me away, like a flood from a swollen river Jordan.

"Martha, Martha, listen well. You have just become aware of the worrying. Now we shall *welcome* this worrying. And then, a little while afterwards, we shall surrender it, let it go. It will melt away and disappear. Are we agreed on this?"

I suppose so. Will this work? Already the worrying has increased.

Dear worrying and fretting, I am looking at you now. I'm not going to fight you now. Welcome, worrying and fretting. For a little while, I am accepting you inside me, as if you were an invited guest in my house. In this way I'll be sure that I won't be sweeping you under the mat, which would not be good at all. Dust swept under the carpet is hidden for a while, but it will cause a big mess later.

Welcome, brother worry, welcome.

A cool breeze has blown the door more open, and a lot of light comes into the room.

I have welcomed you, worry. Now it is time for you to go. Thank you for helping me to become aware of myself. Now I am going to the Still Point, and I will be watching you depart. Goodbye.

From the Still Point, I see the anxiety melt, drop away, and disappear...

Amazing. I never knew that something like this could happen.

I remain as long as possible at the Still Point. A breeze blows the door quite open now, and the room is full of light.

My sister Mary, who had gone to visit our little nephews and nieces, has returned. I can hear her at the front door.

"I'm back! How are you, Martha?"

Let me tell you, Mary, let me tell you how I became free from anxiety...!

She heard me out, listening to me with complete attention.

"That's great, Martha, I'm so happy for you! With the same method you can become free not only from anxiety but also from fear and anger, jealousy, pride, and all the rest. The Lord will help you because in this way you will be making straight the way of the Lord, as our great prophet Isaiah told us to do - remember? *'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight the paths of our God.'* (Is 40:3). The wilderness is your ordinary mind. Yesterday when I was sitting at His feet, there was a straight path in my heart, Martha."

She continued, "And the more you visit the Still Point, Martha — that doorway from where you can see what is happening in your mind and heart — the more you are becoming open to the Lord, to eternal life. How happy I am for you! How happy I am!"

"This evening," Mary continued, "He is coming to our house again. Somebody has just passed me a message from Him. I'll tell you what — as soon as He comes in through the door, let us both embrace Him and give Him a really special hug together!"

What a particular calmness and inner joy I feel, at these words of deep comfort and wisdom from dear sister Mary!

I have just taken a pleasant afternoon nap, deeply restful. I dreamt that he told me, "I am your anchor, my beloved Martha. Trust in Me. Go often to the Still Point, so that we can come closer together. The door below the depths of your heart will open, ajar. And the light of my heavenly father will baptise you."

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Note. In this fictional episode, we see Martha practising the Welcoming Prayer, which helped her to liberate herself of obstacles in her mind and heart, and to move a step closer to the Lord. You can do the same. To prevent worry, fear, anger, pride, pain and so on from carrying you away, look up "Welcoming Prayer" on the following website: www.contemplativeoutreach.org.

The method goes like this:

(A) *Become aware* of the problem or negative emotion in your heart and mind.

(B) Welcome the pain, anger, fear, anxiety, etc. and accept it, for now. Do A,B,A,B,...etc. if necessary, and the distress will diminish.

(C) When you are ready, say goodbye to the distress and tell it that it's time to go. Let it go, do not hold on to it. You will see it melt away and go.

At the same time as you do Step C, you should, if you know how, go to the Still Point, the "place" from which you look calmly and attentively, without thinking or judging, at what is happening in your mind and heart. If you already have some contemplative practice, such as Centering Prayer, also known as the Prayer of Consent) then you may already know how to go to the Still Point whenever you wish. At the Still Point He will sometimes, at His own pleasure, come and take you to Himself for a secret embrace.

The Welcoming Prayer is called a prayer because in recognising and releasing of your attachments to negative thoughts and emotions you are making way for the eternal life, for the Kingdom within. By temporarily welcoming (and then releasing) the obstacles, you are permanently embracing the Holy Spirit.

May the Lord be with you.

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