

Did Martha Really Neglect Jesus?

A Reflection on Martha and Mary

Reflections Prayer, Repentance and the Spiritual Life 16 August 2025

Colossians 3:23

I tend to disagree. Jesus' gentle correction of Martha was not an indictment of service, nor was it a declaration of Mary's superiority in knowing Him. When Jesus said, "Follow Me," He never called for the abandoning of daily life; He did not say, "Stop living." Instead, He gently exposed the dual nature of our existence — worldly and spiritual. Jesus Himself was wholly human and wholly divine, perfectly embodying both realities; we, however, remain conflicted, living in a fallen world, never able to be entirely one or the other.

Martha's anxiety and busyness — her ministry of service — were not acts of spiritual ignorance, but acts of love. She prepared, she served, she gave her best. Was this any less pleasing to God than Mary's attentive listening? Rather, both are facets of faith: service and stillness. Paul's words come to mind: "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Colossians 3:23). Martha's devotion was expressed through her work; Mary's, through her worship. Each honoured Jesus in her own way.

Jesus did not dismiss Martha's service, but cautioned her against letting anxiety overshadow joy. He calls us to balance — to be present to Him in both action and contemplation. Our spiritual journey is not a choice between the worldly and the spiritual, but the bringing of our worldly duties into harmony with the spiritual, offering both as acts of love.

So Martha's story is less about neglect, or about ignorance, and more an invitation to integrate our work and our worship, knowing that both may bring us nearer to Jesus when offered up to Him.