

## A preview of the Last Supper?

That the story of Martha and Mary follows on directly from the parable of the Good Samaritan may or may not be relevant, that parable has become so universal that its application to any situation is not beyond the bounds of possibility. However, I don't think that Luke is necessarily trying to make a connection between the two at all. As he tells us, Jesus is on his journey to Jerusalem, and this informs everything that is taking place. Jerusalem is the city where he will suffer his passion and therefore what takes place on the way has to be seen in the light of this fact. The encounter with Martha and Mary is thus shaped and moulded by this reality.

What is it then about this encounter that brings into focus the events of the passion? The image which comes into my mind is that of the Last Supper, and in particular one sentence which Luke narrates: *For who is the greater: the one at table or the one who serves? The one at table surely? Yet here am I among you as one who serves!* Now, you may think that this contradicts what Jesus has said to Martha about the choice of her sister Mary not to help her with the business of serving at table, and on the face of it, it does seem difficult to deny, but to understand its meaning we have to go back to Jesus' words about his true kinsfolk, when he said: *My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice.* It is in this context, that the service or *diakonia* of Christ, as symbolised by the new commandment to love, is made real in the world. The practical application of this love must flow from Christ's example, which begins with our choice to listen to him. If we return to today's gospel and look at the choices of Martha and Mary, we see that this is the point which Jesus makes.

Our life of service in the gospel, must have its starting point in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the point from which this love commences, is the command of Christ to love as he has loved us. The moment when this sacrificial love is made a practical reality, is when Jesus offers us his love in the sacrament of his body and blood in the form of bread and wine at the Last Supper. All of our good works and acts of service must evolve and emanate from this starting point, and unless they do, we see what ultimately happens. We become immersed in our own self value and self worth to the extent that we end up detached and separated from the fount and source of that which informs our love. For Martha this culminates in her demand that Jesus does as she commands, and we too can reach such a situation as we start to believe that God owes us something in return. What has happened is that we have completely failed to see that God has already given us everything we need when he gave us his Son.

We need to heed Jesus' gentle cajoling of Martha. We need to have our minds and thoughts re-focused once more to the source of our nourishment and sustenance. We need to come to Jesus with our lives devoted to doing the work of the kingdom in the practical and necessary tasks of the living out the gospel values, but always, always in the light of the truth that both the beginning and end of our work is fuelled in the knowledge that his love lives in us.