

“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.”

He was not condemning Martha for her works but rather stating the profound truth that hearing the word must come before faith, and faith before works.

St. Paul confirmed this order in his letter to the Ephesians. He wrote:

So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” (Rom. 10:17)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” (Eph. 2:8-9)

### Conclusion

**S**o where does all this lead? What do these truths teach us? We need to be much more concerned about hearing the word of God than we normally are. We need to put more emphasis on frequently coming to church to worship and pray. It is here, in this temple, that we will hear the living Word of God. It is here that we will meet Jesus Christ, and have the great privilege of listening to His teachings—of sitting at his feet as did Mary in our text. And if we are truly listening, we will find that the Word of God lives not only in our minds but in our heart and actions. Worship, prayer, and sitting at the feet of Jesus will change your life forever, because the Holy Spirit will breath life into our dead souls and we will go to work.

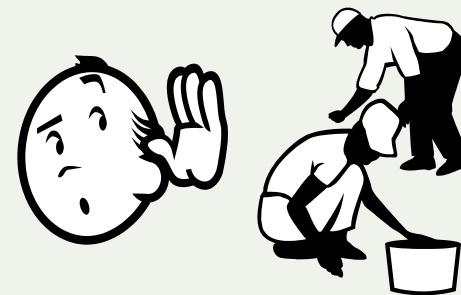
The Prophet Exekiel in his dramatic vision of the valley of the dry bones put it this way:

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, *there were* very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, *they were* very dry. He said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, You know.” Again He said to me, “Prophesy over these bones and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.’” “Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, ‘Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.’” (Ezk. 37:1-6)

Hearing the Word of God, our dead bones come to life, and we begin to move, and speak and act in ways that are pleasing to God—we actual do Good Works.

As we remember our blessed Virgin Mother the Theotokos today, may we strive to be like her whom all generations call Blessed for Jesus said: “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” **Amen!**

# Hearing and Keeping



“Usually a parish is divided between the doers and the listeners. Laity usually complain there are not enough doers, and clergy complain there are not enough listeners.”

Homily given at All Saints Orthodox Church on the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, 2010.

At that time, Jesus entered a certain village; and a woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to Him and said, "Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her." . . . As He said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the breasts that Thou didst suck!" But He said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

### Introduction

The Gospel text this morning is the usual one used for the feast days of the Theotokos. It is really a combination of two texts one from Luke 10 and the other from Luke 11. The Mary mentioned in the first part is not the Theotokos but rather Mary the sister of Lazarus. The Theotokos is not mentioned until the very last two verses and even then not by name. Mary and Martha the sisters of Lazarus are examples of two types of Christians and Jesus used these two ladies to underline that while both doing and hearing are necessary for every Christian, hearing the word of God is of first importance.

I believe that when Jesus spoke these words: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" He specifically had in mind His mother as the premier example of one who first hears the word of God *and* then keeps it. All of her life, Mary's faith and discipleship, were confirmed by her life, her behavior, and her piety. She truly and consistently heard the word of God and kept it.

Hearing and doing; faith and works they belong together but in the proper order. In the Church today, the sad fact is that they are often not together.

### Either One or the Other

Often a parish is divided between the doers and the listeners. Laity usually complain there are not enough doers, and clergy complain there are not enough listeners. Doers are the worker bees—the Marthas. The listeners are the ones who value all things liturgical and who are students of the Scriptures and of the Tradition, both small t and large T—these are the Marys. When the two are separate and not combined then the trouble begins.

Those who are *only* Marthas begin to trust in their many works and activities as a guarantee of their salvation. They think God will obviously reward them for all the good deeds that they have done. The Marthas look at those in the church who do not work or volunteer to work as lazy, lethargic, lumps and therefore fall into the sin of being critical of others and judging others. The Marthas are like the energizer bunny, a continually flurry of activity, and they usually end up bitter and burned out. Worst of all they end up condemned because they trusted in their works and not in Christ. They have works but no faith, and their works are empty—their works are not pleasing to God no

matter how good or great they are in the sight of this world.

Then there those who are Marys *only*. These men and women are content to sit and read and learn and pray and worship. They usually think of themselves as more spiritual than the worker bees in the parish and are severely critical of them. These are the people who know all the so-called rules of the church and they pride themselves in their adherence to even the most minor of these rules. They know the Faith, they know the theology, they know the canons, but when it comes to putting their faith to work in the world, they silently sneak off to their prayer corners and pray that God will send someone else into His vineyard to do the heavy work.

The hard work of struggling against sins, of working to extend the Kingdom of God on earth, of serving the needy, the sick, and the homeless—the humble, uncomplaining acceptance of a real cross and the sacrificial acts of love—all these are absent in those who are only Marys. When it comes to acts of humility—such as cleaning restrooms in the church or cleaning up after a church meal or lunch—they are absent. The Words and Teachings of Christ they know but these are not translated into confirming actions and works. Theirs is a faith without works, and as such, their faith is dead. And just like those who are only Marthas, they end up condemned because they trusted in a dead faith and not in the living Christ.

### Both are Necessary

In our text Jesus said:

"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it."

St. James the Brother of our Lord and the first Bishop of Jerusalem wrote:

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. . . . [O]ne who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22-25)

For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (James 2:26)

The truth is that we need to be both Marthas and Marys *at the same time*. We need to be like the blessed Virgin Mary, the Theotokos. She is the best example in all of the history of the Church of a Christian who truly listened to her Savior and put what she heard into action. She had true faith in Jesus Christ, she sat at his feet and learned from Him, and this faith then resulted in works pleasing to God. The Theotokos had neither a dead faith nor empty works. She had a living faith—a faith that bore the pleasing fruit of good works.

Faith and works must be together, but there is a proper order to them. When Jesus said to Martha in our text: