

## Saint of the Month for July 2014

(A monthly series compiled by Tom Quinlan)

### **Saint Martha** **Tuesday, July 29**

I have chosen St. Martha this month because she reminds me somewhat of myself- prone to worry sometimes, and also periodically anxious about logistics!

Martha lived with her sister Mary and brother Lazarus in Bethany, which is just a few miles east of Jerusalem. They were followers of Jesus, and he knew them quite well. Two well-known Gospel stories tell us most of what we know about her. In John 11 we read about the death of her brother and the miracle by which Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. The other is Luke 10, where Jesus comes for dinner and Martha runs around preparing and serving food while her sister sits by the feet of Jesus and listens to His teaching. She tries to enlist the help of Jesus in getting her sister to help, and does not get that help, but a short lesson in what was most important!

When reading the Luke episode I wonder how many were in the party that followed Jesus, and how much work was required to feed all those people. I feel that Jesus was not being unkind to Martha, but it might come across that way. Perhaps she overdid the meal planning, and focused too much on being the perfect hostess and not enough on simplifying the meal and spending some time herself with the Teacher. This was before “TV Dinners” and microwave ovens, but the meal could probably have been done more quickly and still pleased and satisfied all the guests. She is reminded of what we need to keep in mind as we go about our own (perhaps overly busy, overbooked lives): “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing.” The Way, the Truth, and the Life, being Jesus Himself.

In John 11 we know that a lot of complicated emotions and actions are going on. Lazarus dies, and Jesus hears about it, but delays in visiting his good friends. What’s that all about? I don’t know for sure, but some have suggested that ancient Jewish teachers maintained that you had to wait a few days after death to count it as such. Of course, that goes against the Jewish custom of speedy burials.

Maybe Jesus wanted the miracle to have a greater impact because it would be done when decay had already set in.

In any event, when He comes to Bethany, Martha goes out to meet Jesus, and is asked to confirm her faith by a direct question (before Jesus performs the miracle). Jesus first says: “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and anyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” Then **“Do you believe this?”** Martha says **Yes!**

Sister Wendy Beckett, the British art expert, consecrated virgin, and contemplative hermit wrote about “*Martha’s Anxiety*.” Here is a brief excerpt from the July 2014 **Magnificat**, which took it from her book **Spiritual Letters** (Orbis Books, 2013):

Worry is a canker. And it's *self*-regarding. Whereas all our real life is in Jesus. The function of anxiety is surely to alert us to our dependence on him and to the fact that he alone matters. It is a most useful feeling. It says: you are fragile, unrealized, not in charge of your life, in danger of...*therefore* turn wholly to Jesus. The feeling may or may not diminish but the direction out of self's narrowness into his love has been conquered. We have to go on and on until finally we live out of self, in him....

...

We can feel that growing in love should make life "easier" – that there is some failure in our fear, temptation, struggle. Not so. In fact the tempest may blow more severely as we near the harbor. Jesus could never know a psychic respite, as the Gospels show. But our *attitudes* change. We cease to be afraid of fear; we open our arms to the will for the Father to give us whatever he will, *knowing*, in Jesus, that he gives only "good things."

The celebration is given the rank of Obligatory Memorial. (**Magnificat**, July 2014; **Daily Roman Missal, Third Edition** (Scepter Publishers); **Butler's Lives of the Saints, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition** (Ave Maria Press); **Jerusalem Bible**)

**Collect from the Mass of Saint Martha:**

Almighty ever-living God,  
whose Son was pleased to be welcomed  
in Saint Martha's house as a guest,  
grant, we pray,  
that through her intercession,  
serving Christ faithfully in our brothers and sisters,  
we may merit to be received by you  
in the halls of heaven.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. (**Roman Missal, Third Edition**)

Saint Martha was devoted to Jesus and did believe in Him. She learned that faith deepens and evolves during life on earth, and she was rewarded with eternal life. Most of us need to blend the active and contemplative modes of existence, which can be a long process. Saint Martha, pray for us!