

**Springfield Diocesan Council of Catholic Women 2013 Convention
St. Boniface Parish, Edwardsville, Illinois**

October 8, 2013

**+Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, dear sisters in Christ:

In our Gospel for today, we hear the familiar story of two sisters, Martha and Mary, who have welcomed Jesus into their home to spend some time with Him. Although this Gospel passage is the one that is assigned to this day in the liturgical calendar, I could not think of a more fitting one for our gathering today as it offers a helpful reflection for all of you as you gather together as sisters in Christ for your annual convention.

In this passage, we see a confrontation taking place between Martha and Mary. Martha is busy doing several things around the house to ensure that their guest is being taken care of and feels welcome. She notices that her sister is not doing anything to assist her, so she points this fact out to Jesus, hoping that He will take her side and get her sister to share in the work. His response to her is often misunderstood. There is a temptation to hear in Jesus' reply to Martha a rebuke for her complaining about having to do all of the work while Mary sits and does nothing. In reality, there is

something more significant that Jesus is trying to communicate to her and to all of us with His response.

The Church has seen in this story a description of two different elements that exist in the life of the Church. The first, seen in the example of Martha, represents the Church's role of active service to our neighbor. The other, seen in the example of Mary, represents the contemplative role of being in the presence of the Lord, listening to Him and conversing with Him. While it may seem from the story that the two are contradictory, they are actually complementary. Just before leaving for World Youth Day in Rio this past July, Pope Francis commented on this passage during his Sunday Angelus address. He speaks specifically about this apparent contradiction when he says:

First of all, it is important to understand that this is not about two contradictory attitudes: listening to the word of the Lord, contemplation, and practical service to our neighbor. These are not two attitudes opposed to one another, but, on the contrary, they are two essential aspects in our Christian life; aspects that can never be separated, but are lived out in profound unity and harmony.¹

He goes on to explain that the reason Jesus responded the way that He did was because Martha was too focused on what needed to be done without remembering the underlying principle of that action, which is “listening to the Word of the Lord, to be – like Mary – at the feet of Jesus, with the attitude of a disciple.”

This passage, then, is far more than a story about a disagreement among sisters. Rather, it offers for us a very helpful reflection on the living out of our faith on a daily basis. We must constantly strive for this harmony that the Holy Father speaks about, a harmony between prayer and action. This can be a challenge in a society like ours which extols the virtues of productivity and efficiency.

Such a mindset can easily bleed over into the charitable works that we undertake. Success is sometimes measured in the number of dollars that we raise or the number of people we serve. While those things are important, we must never lose sight of *why* we undertake these activities. The answer to this question of ‘why’ can only really be answered in the context of our faith and the command of Jesus to love our neighbor. We are in need of that constant contact with Him through prayers to ensure that our motives continue to remain pure, that we perform these works out

of love and not out of selfishness. We also need that regular interaction with Him so that we do not get discouraged when times get tough and we are tempted to give up on what we are doing. Being rooted in prayer also helps us to avoid becoming like Martha, where we begin to be critical of others and complain about them, attitudes which severely undermine the effectiveness of our charitable activities.

As you have all gathered here for this annual convention of the Springfield Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, I would like to speak on behalf of all of your pastors as I express my gratitude for the many ways in which you have benefited the diocese and your respective parishes through your prayers and good works. It is my hope that our reflection on this Gospel passage will serve as a source of encouragement for you. The fact that you have been contributing to the well-being of the diocese for many years is a good sign that you are being guided by this harmony between prayer and action. Without that proper balance in place, you would not have been able to sustain your efforts for any extended period of time.

At the same time, we are ever mindful of how easy it can be to lose our focus and become obsessed merely on results. It is therefore important to take an opportunity like this to gather together and revisit the motives

behind our work and ensure that they are being guided by those Gospel values which should be at the heart of all of our actions.

During this month of October, we turn to Our Lady of the Rosary, asking her to intercede for us that we may imitate her example of faithful discipleship. The image of her carrying Christ in her womb as she goes to be of service to her cousin Elizabeth is a reminder to us to always keep Christ close to us through a life of prayer and participation in the sacraments. From that regular encounter with Him, we will better be able to joyfully serve our brothers and sisters in our parishes and in our diocese because we will be guided by Him who is dwelling within us.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 21 July 2013.