

THE GREAT REVERSAL, JULY 21 2019

When God pays a visit to Abraham (in the Trinitarian form of **three** men, no less), Abraham scurries about anxiously acting the host. The Lord appears and Abraham serves him from a distance, as a servant. His obedience to the rule of hospitality however disposes him to receptivity and when the Lord departs, the Patriarch is promised a son within the year. It is from the progeny of this son that the Messiah will be born. With the incarnation of the Christ in Jesus things are flipped on their head: It is God who now seeks to serve us through His indwelling Spirit and to thereby mold us for divinized service. Now the believer does not first serve in order to retire and listen. Rather he listens or ponders the Word, is transformed, and then has the wherewithal to truly and deeply serve God and his fellow men.

Martha has not listened and so she is burdened with much serving. Unfortunately, her service is not an expression of an intimacy of love received, but a reluctant response to perceived duty and obligation. As a result she is anxious, worried and increasingly embittered (she is “burned-out”). Uninspired by the Word she has become hardened of heart. This makes her moralistic and petulantly demanding; far more concerned with her neighbor’s behavior than her own. Notice how she triangulates with Jesus, wanting him to use his greater authority to command her sister Mary to help her! Of course Jesus will have nothing to do with this all too common human game. In what might strike some as brutal honesty, our Lord makes it clear that Mary has chosen the better part and that it will not be taken from her.

The “better part” does not involve choosing one type of vocation over another. Neither is it anti-service or does it imply inactivity. The “better part” refers to a way of existing within one’s own soul; to becoming one with Christ and seeing the world through his eyes. This perception immerses one in a state of docility, namely the gifts of the Holy Spirit come to fruition. To be truly docile to the Spirit is to be attuned only to the voice of Christ; to hear him alone with all distractions tuned out.

Alarmingly, Mary is all but unknown in our age, for few pause to listen for the voice of God; a voice which speaks most clearly in silence. No, unfortunately we are all trained from the earliest of ages to be Martha first and foremost. Because of this do we continually search out distractions and stimulations of ever-greater intensity. The cell phones beep, buzz and chirp and we never cease to spring into action at their incessant call. And when we ultimately do so? Well, you can bet that it isn’t God on the other end of that line!