

# THAT LATEST BIT OF NONSENSE FROM THE VATICAN

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Pentecost 8C – July 18, 2010

Amos 8:1-12+Psalm 52+Colossians 1:15-28+Luke 10:38-42

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The story from Luke's Gospel This morning is not about how two sisters with different temperaments either get along – or don't – when they live under the same roof.

It's a little too quick and too easy to say that Martha is the over-functioning, resentful busybody, and that Mary is the thoughtful, and perhaps even shy and retiring adoring fan of Jesus.

Martha is busy with many tasks. Luke doesn't tell us what kind of tasks. We don't know for certain that these are immediate, household tasks – in the kitchen or perhaps the garden. I suppose that most of us assume that Martha is busy getting supper ready. That is certainly the image that usually comes to my mind.

The word that Luke uses to describe Martha's activity is *diakinos*. Deacon.

The four evangelists and the authors of the rest of what we call the New Testament actually do use this word a great deal. It almost always is used in the context of serving God and of the work of God's kingdom.

Martha and her many tasks. Not Martha in the kitchen, but Martha the Deacon.

Yet even if we do go with the idea that Martha is busy being a Deacon she still complains to Jesus:

*Do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me.*

What began as a simple visit and perhaps a dinner party for their favorite rabbi has become something entirely different for the two sisters in today's Gospel. When Jesus encounters both Mary & Martha, he sees two people whom he loves.

He sees Mary, who is not at all representing the shy, reserved, adoring fan. She is actually quite boldly doing what no woman should have ever done. She is in the role of a disciple – sitting at the feet of a rabbi, listening to him teach – something that both tradition and law would inform both her and Jesus that only a man should do.

Jesus also sees Martha. It doesn't really matter exactly what tasks she was about. She might have been fixing supper. She might have been organizing the care of widows and orphans. She might have been trying to recruit Sunday School teachers, or choir members, or counselors for Summer Camp.

It wasn't a matter of the tasks.

The issue is that she was worried and distracted.

It is so easy to get worried and distracted. We can have the most wonderful, self-giving, altruistic, charitable list of tasks in the world. Whatever the task – getting distracted and worried puts us at risk of losing sight of the One who created us.

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Losing sight of the One who created us has been on my heart and soul these past few days, since the Vatican has published their last bit of nonsense.

I've struggled with whether or not to deal with this issue in a sermon – but the more that I tried to lay it down, the more it kept coming back.

Before jumping into the deep end, please understand with me that when I speak about the Vatican and their nonsense, I am not taking about the thousands and thousands – even millions – of faithful members of the Roman Catholic faith.

The dedication and self-giving love that is expressed day-in –and–day-out by Roman Catholic laity, nuns, monks, & clergy is a wonderful gift to our own community and beyond. The 'tasks' performed by Catholic Charities, in parochial schools, and parishes are both life-giving and life-fulfilling.

We should nurture, celebrate, and enjoy our many friendships with our RC brothers and sisters.

Which makes it all the more bizarre and confusing whenever the leadership in the Vatican issues another of their seemingly endless statements on church polity.

This past week, the Vatican produced new guidelines dealing with the issue of the sexual abuse by children by RC clergy. While it is a step forward, it still is flawed policy. The Vatican continues to see charges of the sexual abuse of children by clergy as an internal church matter.

Bishops are only 'encouraged' to report charges of sexual abuse to local law enforcement authorities – and even then – only if the local civil statutes require them to do so. This new policy is a mere baby step along the path that the Vatican must eventually take to deal honestly and compassionately with the issue of the sexual abuse of children by clergy.

How you may ask, does this issue intersects with the Gospel for today?

The statement issued by the Vatican placed the sin of the sexual abuse of children by clergy in the same moral category as the ordination of women to the priesthood.

The Vatican takes a look at Katherine Jefferts-Schori, our Presiding Bishop; looks at Jean Campbell, the Rector of Trinity Episcopal Church down the road in Fishkill, looks at Mary Gregorius, who was ordained a priest from this parish. That Vatican looks the ordination of these and all other woman who serve God in God's church, is looked upon by the Vatican as the moral equivalent of pedophilia.

Ordaining a woman to the clergy is as much of a sin, as a priest sexually abusing a child – according to the Vatican's latest bit of nonsense.

How incredibly ironic that such a statement should be published during the same week that millions of Catholic clergy will be called upon to preach on the episode of Mary & Martha.

Martha – who is described by Luke as being a Deacon.

Mary – who is described by Luke as taking on the role of a Disciple.

According to the latest view from the Vatican, neither of these two women would be welcome to exercise those ministries. In fact – if they did so, they would be seen as committing a heinous sin.

What. A. Mess.

I thank God for the women – both lay and ordained – who have helped to shape and mold me into the person and priest that I am today.

I thank God for the women – both lay and ordained – who have contributed so much to the life and ministry of this parish – both in the past, in our own day, and in the years that lie ahead of us.

I thank God for the women who continue to serve God through the Roman Catholic tradition. The lay women and those in holy orders who exercise their ministry in the Roman Catholic church should be nurtured and supported by all who know and love them.

Perhaps some day the scales will fall from the eyes of the leadership in the Vatican, and that institution will be able to see and comprehend

that God created both male & female in the image of God, and that in Christ there is no distinction between men and women.

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Let us pray: Holy and life-giving God, help us to be more like those two incredible sisters. May we, like Martha be unafraid to pick up those challenges and opportunities. May we, like Mary stay mindful that remaining rooted, grounded, nourished and in love with you, is the better part. Amen.