

This last week has been a perpetual steam bath hasn't it? Temperatures in the mid to high 90s, humidity between 50% and 70%, heat index between 104 and 113 degrees in the shade. Even the water in the swimming pools is in the 90s. Welcome to the Sand Hills of North Carolina!

But Saturday morning I was sitting on the back porch enjoying a gentle breeze in the shade and the temperature was about 78 degrees. One side of my mind said to hurry through prayers and then get going on the list of chores before it got too hot. The other side said, relax, enjoy the moment; watch the birds, look at the flowers, the chores will be there, the prayers will keep for a few minutes. It is good to enjoy the gift God has given you in this moment.

We live in a society that values planning and hard work. Many of us have spent our lives with our nose to the grind-stone pushing on to the next goal. Sometimes it is just getting the kids out for school or soccer, maybe a major project at work, getting through a course in school, graduation, the next promotion... there doesn't seem to be an end to the list.

There isn't anything wrong with having goals and plans to achieve them. It is a good idea to keep a calendar so we don't end up double booking our time and wasting someone else's time or inadvertently insulting them. We need to support our families and care for our children. Much of what we do is essential physical and mental activity with these goals in mind.

But there is more to life than being hamsters in the cage of career, running on the economic wheel trying to get to the carrot. We are also spiritual creations; we have a soul that needs food, exercise and rest just like our bodies and our minds. But if we don't watch it, our spiritual life can easily turn into a second hamster wheel where we constantly run trying to get the treat that we can only have by standing still.

Pope Saint Gregory the Great stated that Martha and Mary represent the two dimensions of the spiritual life. (*Moralia* 2,6) Martha labors and is busy doing good works, necessary works and probably some busy work as well. In this Gospel moment, she is living the active life. Mary is sitting at the foot of Our Lord, the position of a disciple, and listening to him with her heart. She is living the contemplative life in this Gospel moment.

Activity and contemplation are both essential for Christian living, but activity terminates and the end of our physical life, where contemplation continues

in heaven where reaches perfection. Therefore, Mary in paying attention to her guest, Jesus Christ and contemplating what he had to say in her heart chose the better portion.

What does this mean to us, to our daily lives? Our time is limited. Between work, children, school, after school activities, and just maybe a little time for our spouse and ourselves carving out daily time for spiritual contemplation is probably a bridge too far. Even finding time for daily prayer is a challenge for most of us.

You have heard Father and I both say that salvation is found in the ordinary events of every day life. In order to seek salvation in our daily lives physical and mental tasks must be grounded in our spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ, in our love of God. We need to blend Martha and Mary into a coherent whole that enriches our lives and our relationships, particularly our relationship with Christ.

Christian activity, that is prayer, fasting, almsgiving, performing charitable works, are all essential activities and they work to pre-dispose us to recognize a contemplative opportunity in our lives. When we start our day with a prayer and intention to offer the day, all the toil, the disappointments, sorrows, and joys in prayer, our lives become prayer.

Then we need to recognize the small opportunities to say thank you to God for his gifts to us. When we go grocery shopping for the fruits of the earth and the resources we have to pay for them. When we travel for our safe arrival at our destination. For the ability to work and contribute to the good of society. For the time to live in the moment with Jesus.

We need to take a moment ever once in a while just to appreciate all that God has done for us. Quietly, without fuss, without words, to just let our hearts speak for us. To quietly open our hearts, our house to Jesus and let him fill us with his presence.

So what did I do with Saturday morning? You have probably already worked it out. Before I got to my prayers and chores I took a hint from Mary and set the day aside for about 20 minutes to appreciate God's creation and his work in my life without words, quietly with my heart. It was wonderful! You need to try it!