“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. Mary has chosen the better portion.”

Most everyone, if not everyone here today, has been TO or BY a certain store in Eastview Mall that HAS to be the busiest store in the whole mall. Somewhere in the US of A, there is at least once a year a Consumer Electronics Show – many thousands of people come from far and wide to check out the latest technological innovations and gadgets which promise to improve the quality of our lives by helping us to stay organized, better manage our time, and stay connected.

While many of the devices displayed have many beneficial effects, there remains the potential for detrimental effects that might easily be overlooked. First, being plugged into the world of electronic media w/ cell phones, smart phones, computers and the internet makes it possible for family, friends, coworkers and supervisors to reach us during any time of day or night. This can easily lead us to mistakenly believe that we have the duty to be constantly available to others, thereby failing to set aside the quiet time we might need to help ensure our lives are properly focused and on the right track.

“Martha, Martha. . . .” Another potential downside to being plugged into the world of electronic media is that we can become so busy trying to return phone calls, read and respond to text messages, and read and answer emails that we lose focus and become disconnected from those things that are important for our spiritual, emotional and psychological well-being – our relationship w/ God and our relationships w/ family and friends. We can fail to be aware of what is happening at the deepest core of our being and the world around us.

What we do is not who we are. *Who we are is determined by our relationships.* In our gospel story today, St. Luke wrote that Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. He was not describing her posture but her relationship w/ him. To “sit at the feet” of someone meant to be that person’s disciple. In the Jewish culture of Jesus’ day, it was unheard of that a woman would be the disciple of a rabbi. Religion, or at least its external observances, was left to men. Jesus broke a tradition of long standing because that tradition was not right. He had come to call all people, women equally w/ men, children as well as adults, and even those who were looked upon as sinners, to be his disciples. He insisted that Mary had made the right choice. She understood his invitation and accepted it. Martha felt obliged to maintain her stereotype, to agree that her place was in the kitchen. Jesus was not scolding Martha who was probably surprised when Jesus refused to reinforce her request for help. We can picture Jesus w/ a big smile on his face when he said the famous words, “Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things.” Jesus was practical enough to realize that food had to be prepared, but he was encouraging Martha to keep it simple, one thing was enough. Then he added, not only for Martha, but for everyone of all times: “Mary has chosen the better portion and she shall not be deprived of it.” Jesus wanted Martha to make the same choice.

Mary is a model for everyone. We are called to be disciples of Jesus, to offer him the warm hospitality he experienced at that home in Bethany, to listen to him as intently as did Mary, to make him the priority of our lives, and to allow nothing and no one to
deprive us of our relationship w/ him. Abraham in our first reading [Genesis 18:1-10a] offered hospitality to the angels who were messengers from God. We are urged to offer hospitality to Jesus, Who is the Son of God.

We should understand that in a profound sense we sit at the feet of Jesus at Mass during the Liturgy of the Word. The Second Vatican Council’s document *Constitution on the Liturgy* solemnly teaches us that “Christ is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the church.” (#7) Jesus wishes us to focus our attention on him, to hear his word in faith, to absorb it and to apply it to our lives. Then we are nourished w/ a sacred food, the Eucharist, which is prepared not by Martha, but by Jesus himself.

Maybe we find the example of Mary difficult to follow. It’s easy to allow the preoccupations of daily living, the constant pressure we’ve placed on ourselves of being available to others through electronic media, easy to allow these things to distract us from hearing and following the teachings of Jesus.

What’s more, following the example of Mary will mean hardships and suffering. St. Paul in our second reading [Colossians 1:24-28] today reminds us that there is a gap between what the church IS AND WHAT IT IS CALLED TO BE. We can close this gap by living lives that are true to Jesus and the gospel. Is it possible to be focused on the Word of God (Mary) AND also focused on the task at hand (Martha)?

Our newly elected Pope Francis is an answer to that question. Francis is a man of action; his choice is to serve the poor. While a cardinal in Argentina, he washed the feet of those in prison, hospices and hospitals. On his first Holy Thursday as Pope, he celebrated Mass w/ youth at a detention center and washed their feet. Unlike Martha, Pope Francis seems energized rather than burdened by his service. To my mind, Francis is saying with Paul, “I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church, of which I am a minister in accordance w/ God’s stewardship given to me . . . .”

Pope Francis’ action is born from his love of and focus on the person of Jesus. What does the story of Martha and Mary teach us? Before we focus on service, we must focus on God. Once we know and love the Lord Jesus, then our service rises up from a holy place within us.

It is most important that in the midst of the fast pace and the many distractions of modern life that we take a break and sit at the feet of Jesus and listen.