

Martha at Rest

by Maureen McCann Waldron

When we hear the story of Martha and Mary, the sisters who were such close friends of Jesus', we most likely know which one we are.

I have always been a Martha, and like most Marthas, perhaps a little smug about it. We Marthas might roll our eyes when this gospel comes up, picturing Mary sitting on the floor listening to Jesus and feeling Martha's slow burn at her unhelpful sister. Martha was the one who got things done. Those of us who are Marthas suspect deep down that they somehow translated the ancient words incorrectly and that instead of stopping Martha from her frantic pace in the kitchen, Jesus was really saying to her, "Way to go, Martha. If you weren't running around getting things done, we wouldn't have dinner tonight or a place to gather."

Martha was the one who would argue with her dear friend, Jesus, and complain to him about things that seemed unfair. She had a spark to her that I admire.

My Martha life has always been guided by To-Do lists and priorities. I am all about productivity, tidying things up and closing the cupboard doors that stand open. I am efficient and self-reliant. And then I got sick.

This summer, after a small but nagging headache that lasted a few weeks, I found myself in the emergency room of the hospital. I had a bleeding on my brain. I was in intensive care for six days. My head was shaved and I had surgery and was sent home ... to do nothing.

I have spent the last four months at home, recovering, waiting for my energy to return. For the first time in 36 years, I don't go into an office every day. I don't "do" much of anything.

Day by day, week by week, I can feel my energy slowly returning, but in the meantime I have been cared for tirelessly by my dear husband. I had meals delivered by a dozen people in our parish – some I hardly knew. People sent flowers and cards, letters and plants. For the first time, I wasn't the Do-er but the Receiver.

And for these past months, I have been Mary. Sitting quietly. Reading. Watching my husband put together every meal. Seeing my colleague at the office carry on with our work. Receiving.

It has been a wonderful experience not to be rushing all the time; to take naps a few times a day and to be what I might have called "unproductive." Now I have a new respect for the art of "restoring" the depleted resource of my energy. I pay more attention now. I watched my summer garden in fascination and have really noticed the spectacular fall leaves.

Mary listened to Jesus as she sat on the floor, while Martha just picked up the general ideas — she was so very busy with her preparations. Now, after all of these months at home and contemplating that story, I understand that I didn't get it right.

I don't think Jesus was telling Martha to stop everything she did. I think he just missed her. He loved her fiery intelligence but wanted her not to be so distracted. He invited her to sit next to him and simply *be* with him. He wasn't looking for her productivity or her finished To-Do list.

And he isn't checking my list either. I won't find a higher place in heaven because I have finished more or been more productive. Jesus is simply calling me to sit next to him and listen and not be distracted by Doing. He wants me to notice how much he loves me and to relax deeply into that love.

I know that as my energy returns, so will my To-Do lists. But I want to keep my life a little slower. I want to pay more attention to the world around me. And I want to sit on the floor next to Jesus and to lean back comfortably on his shoulder, basking in his love, his stories and his laugh, and remember what a graced life this is.