

The tension between Martha and Mary echoes the tension between St Benedict and St Scholastica over when and where to pray or contemplate God's word as opposed to when to pursue other activities, other forms of service. It also echoes the tension between order and disorder which characterise life in general and the desire we naturally have to impose some sort of order or routine on the chaos which we otherwise fear will take over. Martha naturally wants to help to make sure her guests have all they need – an honourable sentiment, surely – and St Benedict wants to obey his monastic call to spend the night within his monastic setting – to honour his vow of stability. But there is perhaps a greater stability at work over which we have no control and the clue to this perhaps is in the words of the angel in today's reading from the book of Revelation:

*Blessed (that is, by God's gift) are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.*

For if there's one thing about this wedding feast that shouldn't surprise us, but often does, it is that it's no static state of affairs but a very active state of movement and ecstatic joy. We think of heaven as a place of rest but isn't it rather a place of 'creative dissonance' or 'stable disequilibrium' – a continuation, indeed, of life as life now? We've used this metaphor before but it reminds me once again of Adam Nicholson's image of steering a small sailing boat:

*Nothing is stable and yet everything coheres, nothing is fixed: the sail itself, the sheet running from it to my right hand, the rudder and its tiller in the other, my own body and its balancing weight on the gunwale, constantly moving in and out of the boat at each change of the wind and knock from the sea.*

(p. 159. *The Sea is not made of Water*)

Ever at risk of disequilibrium, of a tipping point which turns the whole boat over; of the sudden sound and flash of thunder and lightning, perhaps, when God takes charge of the tiller and keeps Mary at prayer and St Benedict out of his monastery, serving that greater purpose for which we've all been made. Love, then, as the underlying logos which keeps everything at rest and on the move.

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