

Feast of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus 29/7/26

In a recent survey of what people think about all day, the summary was found to be largely work, coffee, and bed. Of course, it has to be more nuanced than that. The researchers further found that people could be grouped into 'worriers, domestics, bodily thinkers, and the work-hard, play-hard types'. And of course, once again, it has to be more nuanced than that - with people sharing characteristics of all four groups and moving between them according to age and circumstances and so on. Context is everything - it was, after all, a survey of only 258 people aged between 19 and 71 - which I gently suggest would exclude most of us present today. The context for today's feast was that it was originally only a celebration of Martha but has been expanded to include Mary and Lazarus. This gives us a much more nuanced understanding of both Martha and Jesus. They exist not only in relation to one another as the unique individuals they are, but in relation to a much larger story that involves us all.

The alternative gospel passage offered on the original feast celebrating Martha only depicts her, once again, as arguing with Jesus, this time as to being left to do all the domestic work alone, to which she receives the answer, "Martha, Martha, you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed indeed, only one". In the light of today's rebuke by Martha at Jesus's delay, I wonder if we can see that Martha's response to his answer this time is a dawning realisation of what this 'one' might be. This is the larger context for all our lives when we worry about 'work' or 'coffee' or 'bed'; we have to constantly remind ourselves that Jesus is the one who will, even now, raise us up from the petty concerns of each day - this doesn't mean that they don't have to be addressed, but it does mean we are not alone in addressing them. Lazarus rises again into this life and all its worries, but he's not the same Lazarus as he was before, no more than Mary and Martha are the same as before. Everything changes in the light of Christ.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour