

*powerfully unto thee, that in thee I may take rest,
for thou didst make me for thee, and my heart is
unquiet till it be united to thee.
(From the 'Thanksgivings')*



Then he takes us right into the heart of the Trinity, in a three-fold prayer for the love of the Father, sanctification in the Spirit and grace to imitate Christ in the perfection of his integrated human life:

*And seeing, O eternal Father, thou didst create
me that I might love thee as a son, give me grace
that I may love thee as my Father.*

*O only begotten Son of God, redeemer of the
world, seeing thou didst create and redeem me
that I might obey and imitate thee, make me to
obey and imitate thee in all thy imitable perfec-
tions.*

*O Holy Ghost, seeing thou didst create me to
sanctify me, do it, O do it for thine own glory.
(Ibid)*

Here is the one needful thing to be shared in by all the Marthas and Marys of this world alike, to be sought for earnestly by ourselves: the definitive integration of activity and prayer, praise and service within the oneness of the blessed Trinity. We join our prayer with that of Traherne as he concludes:

*. . . . O do it for thine own glory; that I may
acceptably PRAISE and SERVE the holy and undi-
vided Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity. Amen.*

Service and praise indissolubly one for ever.

**SERVICE and PRAISE -
The one needful thing
Thomas Traherne 4**

Christian tradition has often seemingly opposed Martha and Mary, (*Luke 10:38-41*), good works versus prayer, doctrine and worship over against the social gospel. But this is not an either/or business. The wholeness of the Christian revelation validates both emphases and holds them in fine balance. Neither must overpower the other.

But that's the rub. On the individual level we tend to be inclined this way or that - extrovert or introvert, and all the other categories of opposites the psychologists encourage us to discern and accept in ourselves. We can see the same patterns being worked out in the Christian Church through the ages, different movements and schools of thought, even the differences between the denominations themselves. But the wholeness we are positing is notoriously volatile, more achievable in the ideal than in the nitty gritty.

The Martha and Mary story, though, is not as outrageous as might at first appear. Jesus is not hauling Martha over the coals for being full of practical and necessary common sense, getting on with things that have to be done, nor is he praising Mary for having her head in the clouds. Rather, as some of the original versions seem to imply, he is curbing Martha's anxious over-busyness and critical spirit. There is not quite as much to do in the immediate as she is perhaps trying to make out. Who Jesus is and what he is about has to come first at that precise moment. The balance

between the worldly and the other-worldly has to be worked out. In Jesus alone, God made man, is it fully achieved. We need both to sit at his feet *and* put what we hear into practice in order even to begin the process of integration in ourselves.

Thomas Traherne, 17th century Anglican priest, poet and writer, puts it all very succinctly in his *Church's Year Book*:

One may not be so given to contemplation as to forget the good of one's neighbour, nor so given over to action as to forget divine speculation.

This comes, we sense, from the heart of Traherne's own experience. His writings reveal him as a man of prayer and deep spiritual insight but at the same time very outgoing. To quote his own words:

Thou Lord hast made thy servant a sociable creature; for which I praise thy name; a lover of company, a delighter in equals . . . O Lord I delight in thee for making my soul so wholly active, so prone to employment, so apt to love.. (From the 'Thanksgivings')

But the overall impression gained is not of a man pulled hither and thither between conflicting poles but rather of one who has found the key to integration. That key is Christ. Traherne explains it himself in the same passage from *The Church's Year* referred to above:

Our Saviour Jesus lived a life in public, sociable, humane, charitable, free and common. And yet, for opportunity of special devotion, retired to prayer and contemplation.

We certainly see this plainly set forth in the gospel. Jesus did not spare himself in his work for others, but there were also times when he 'went off a great while before dawn' in order to pray (*Mark 1:32-39*). He didn't make a great public spectacle of his prayer but did it all quietly and privately just as he counselled his followers (*Matt 6:5-6*). But pray he

did, his whole life being a necessary and vital communion with his heavenly Father (*John 5:19 seq.; 6:57; 7:29; 8:28-9 & 55-56; 11:42 et al*).

Traherne reminds us of all this very graphically too:

It was in solitude that (Jesus) kept his fasts. Rocks and mountains heard his prayers. Among beasts was he born, and in the wilderness he fed his thousands. Upon a mountain he prayed, upon a mountain he was transfigured, upon a mountain he died, to a mountain in Galilee he invited his disciples, and from a mountain he ascended.

In which retirements his devotions received a great advantage of freedom from distractions. (Ibid).

We take our cue therefore from Jesus, he who sometimes was so hard-pressed by the crowds that he didn't have leisure to eat and had to flee with his disciples across the lake to try and find a place to be apart and rest awhile. (*Mark 6:30-32*). Withdrawal is sometimes absolutely necessary for our spiritual well-being and sanity. But it must never be a selfish end in itself. Traherne sums it up for us all, showing where the balance is to be held and so where the point of integration is to be found:

. . . . solitude is a good school to learn piety and virtue in, and the world the best theatre to practise it in. (Ibid).

All the same this ideal state of equilibrium is not static, nor is it something we can achieve merely through our own efforts. We must first ask God to reveal himself to us that we might find our 'poise', our 'rest' in him. Otherwise life tends to become nothing but feverish activity. With echoes of St. Augustine Traherne prays:

O infinite God, centre of my soul, convert me