

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

It is the tradition of the Holy Church to commemorate St. Martha of Bethany on this date, the 29th day of July each year. St. Martha is mentioned in Holy Scripture three times. The first is St. Luke's record of our Lord eating a meal at the house Martha shares with her sister Mary and brother Lazarus.

The second account of Scripture that names Martha is the Johannine account of the death of Lazarus. Following John's account of the raising of Lazarus, Martha again is mentioned as serving at a dinner for the Lord, a dinner attended by the resurrected Lazarus. Although Scripture makes no clear assertion of Martha's marital status, the church remembers her as a virgin.

Outside of these two accounts, Martha is not named elsewhere in Scripture, although she may well be included in the frequent references to the group of women who ministered to the Lord during His "earthly ministry."

In St. Luke's account, our Lord travels from Galilee to Jerusalem. On the way, at what Scripture calls "a certain village", perhaps Bethany, Martha welcomed the Lord into their house. Mary sat at His feet hearing His Word, Martha busied about preparing the meal. Martha's actions are described in the original language as "διακονία", from which our word "deacon" is derived. It means to serve while executing the commands of others. In this case her deaconess business was preparing dinner.

Mary's choice to forsake the preparations, to sit at the feet of Jesus, and to hear His Word, is praised by the Lord as choosing the "good part", which He promised will not be taken away from her. Martha is described as being drawn away from the Lord to serve.

She complains to our Lord that Mary isn't helping her, and asks the Lord to direct Mary to help her, to which the Lord gives His reply regarding the "good part", to sit at His feet and to hear His Holy Word. It is that "good part" that you have chosen by being here this morning. And it will not be taken away from you.

The account of St. John identifies Lazarus as the brother of Mary, and so of Martha. Upon learning of Lazarus' illness, before going to Bethany, St. John records that "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." It is beloved Martha that runs from the house filled with mourners to meet the Lord on the road. Her words to Him reveal great faith: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

His love for Martha, for Mary and for Lazarus is manifest in the only two-word verse of Holy Scripture, John 11:35 – for at the report of Lazarus' entombment, "Jesus wept." It may well be the shortest verse in the Bible, but it speaks volumes. Martha, agreeing with the Lord's assertion that Lazarus will rise again, confesses "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." It is to her assertion that the Lord answers "I AM the "I am the resurrection and the

life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”

It is then, after confessing who He is, that the Lord asks the question that each of us, that every man of all time, must answer: “Do you believe this?” Martha’s answer rivals the best confessions of faith in the New Testament: “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” Perhaps those words, recorded by St. John the Divine, who may well have heard them spoken, are the words for which we commemorate St. Martha this day.

In St. Martha each of us can see ourselves. Distracted by the things of the world, she chose the kitchen rather than a Divine homily. But in her defense, she was doing only what Abraham had done when visited by the Lord – preparing the finest of meals. But the Lord came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. He is the Divine Deacon, serving Himself up on the cross to reconcile the world to the God who created all things.

And so too were the Twelve directed to serve – to serve Christ to His Holy Church, to bring the saving Gospel to the ends of the earth. And that Apostolic Ministry is continued, that work of serving Christ to His Church, by the called and ordained servants of Christ, deacons in the truest sense. Through them you receive Christ and His Gospel in all its forms, for the forgiveness of your sins, and for the creation and strengthening of your faith.

Lazarus did rise. He rose by Christ’s command. The Lord that commanded Martha’s brother to come forth from the tomb would Himself fill the tomb. He too would rise. He rose in a way that only God the Son could – by His own power. He defeated sin on the cross. He defeated death by rising to new life.

And that atoning death and justifying life is made yours by hearing the “good part”, the Holy Gospel, and believing. For you too He is the Resurrection and the Life. You who believe in Him shall never die. As Lazarus was called forth by the voice of God, so too will you be called forth as Martha confessed: in the resurrection, at the last day.

This day it is the risen and ascended Lord that serves you. He invites you into His house, this house of God, for a Divine Meal. He serves Himself to you as you receive His Body and His Blood, the Best Part. Your sins are forgiven. Your faith is made strong. You eat and drink Christ, and your “Amen” confesses with Martha “Yes, Lord, I believe...”

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