

Worry seems to have taken over our country. Therapists and psychologists have noticed a huge uptick in the numbers of people suffering from the results of worrying. Many of us are not sleeping well, we are frequently irritated. Worry seems to be a worldwide pandemic in itself.

Earlier in the week, as I read today's gospel, Jesus' words, *"Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things;* I recalled my grandmother's voice. "I am worried to distraction", she sometimes used to exclaim.

I could see that in that moment nana was more than just a little worried. She was worried so much that she couldn't even focus. I thought about Martha again. I wondered how the phrase "worried to distraction" was actually defined.

Naturally, I went to Google to check:

"Worried to distraction," I typed in. "Worried to distraction, meaning" was the first hit. Eureka! Here's what it said:

"When you're worried to distraction, **you're so agitated you feel like you're going crazy**. Distraction comes from the Latin *dis-*, "apart," and *trahere*, "drag." So, worried to distraction is when worry drags us apart from our task or our duties."

*Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."*

So--- this gospel today may not be about the people who do all the work, vs. the people that do not. Nor does it seem to be about action vs. contemplation. It doesn't even seem to be about which type of person is the better follower of Jesus: Mary or Martha.

It's about Jesus' concern about Martha being worried to distraction. And why would he be? Martha—and many of us today-- have become so anxious and preoccupied that we lose our ability to hear Jesus in the present moment.

Let's be honest, when we are distracted by our to-do lists, when we are distracted by worry, when we are distracted by voices from the right and from the left, when we are distracted by issues of safety and issues of autonomy, when the world has become loud and distorted by the constant noise of voices clamoring for our attention—it's really hard to hear what *Jesus* is trying to tell us—to show us—in the moment.

Jesus' voice often can't compete with our internal voices (get this done, get that done, be this, be that), or the external voices (buy me, worry about this, be upset about that). Life can be a cacophony of attention grabbing noise.

Those of us who have been blessed to spend time with very small children know how this can play out.

Go back in your memory to a time when a small child (or maybe not so small child) was trying to get your attention about something important to them, when we were occupied or focused on something else.

It reminds me of Stewie on the Family Guy. I don't know how many of you watch this-- I don't even watch this show-- but I have seen a clip from it where Stewie, this small kid, was trying to get his mother's attention by saying, "mom, mommy, mommy, mama, mom, mom, mommy mommy mommy..." for about 3 minutes. It cracked me up, because— on the one hand ---I've been there, and on the other hand, because I've sometimes felt like Stewie—trying to get someone's attention when they were completely not paying attention.

Imagine how Jesus feels. He's saying something important, and we think our chores, our tasks, our WORRIES, are more important to listen to than the voice of God.

Sometimes we think we are listening—while we do other things, but honestly, we are often not really paying attention. We are caught up in everything else. Sometimes we are listening but may feel a little resentful that we only get to listen with one ear while others around us don't do their part. Mmmm hmmm.

We are worried to distraction. It's interesting how everything and *everyone around us* suffers when we're worried to distraction.

Don't make Jesus say, "Children, children, children, kid, you, you, you, you..." "

So-- Jesus goes up to Martha (and us) and says—put it down. Put it all down. All the worry. All the distractions. All the things you absolutely have to do. Put them down for a minute. I would like your attention for one minute. Or maybe even TWO.

And what will Jesus say to us? I have no idea.

But we'll never hear it if we can't occasionally stop being so busy, so worried, so distracted by what is happening around us that we can't take a few minutes out of our busy busy lives and listen to what he has to say to us.

And may Jesus' message will be this: being worried to distraction will never change the world. Only love will. Amen.