

16 (C)

While journeying on horseback one day, St Benedict met a peasant walking along the road. 'You've got an easy job,' said the peasant, 'If I became a man of prayer like you, then I too would be travelling on horseback.' 'You think praying is easy,' replied the Saint. 'If you can say one "Our Father" without any distractions, you can have my horse.' 'It's a bargain,' said the surprised peasant. Closing his eyes and folding his hands he began to say the Our Father aloud: 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come....' Suddenly he stopped short and looked up. 'Can I have the saddle and bridle too'?

Distractions don't just apply to prayer but our minds can be preoccupied by so much 'trivia' that reflecting on the deeper questions of life don't get a look-in. I always feel that Mary and Martha's home was a place where Jesus could get away from it all, put His feet up and rest his weary bones for a few hours. The Bible tells us that Jesus loved Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. Maybe that was because they gave him space to unwind. Since holiday time is here, I'm sure today's Gospel was chosen for this reason. But even whilst on a break some people are forever on the tear.

The gospel tells us that Mary sat down at the Lord's feet. "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone," wrote the French philosopher Blaise Pascal. Can we at least put down our electronic devices, our phones and our brain numbing activities for a few minutes and try to sit quietly alone somewhere? We're told Sheffield is quite a polluted city with high levels of carbon dioxide but there's another kind of pollution - it's the almost constant noise and din around us. I was shopping in the big Tesco store recently and the music being played over the loudspeaker was so loud, it was bordering on the uncomfortable. I'm sure when historians settle on a phrase to describe our period in history they'll call it 'the age of distractions'. On the standard supermarket shelf, instead of there being one or two of everything we're spoilt for

choice which can tire us out. Variety may be the spice of life but it can also deaden our spirits. It means we have neither the time nor inclination to raise our minds to God and the transcendent. Even Sunday rest seems the exception these days. The saying '*No rest for the wicked*' is indeed believable. The author of psalm 23 describes how God is asking him to sit by the restful waters in order to revive his drooping spirit.

Jesus has a gentle word with Martha when he sees her tied up with all the serving. Yes, we all need food to survive, even Jesus did, but it should not take precedence over nourishing the spirit. Listening to Jesus and His words of wisdom was quality time out for Mary. Reflecting on His life-giving words will revive our drooping spirits as well.