Last Sunday we heard the Parable of the Good Samaritan, when Jesus illustrated how important it is to put our faith into practice, to “do something” rather than pass on by like the priest and the Levite, who did nothing. After telling the parable, upon reflection that the helpful Samaritan was the proper neighbor to the robbery victim, Jesus gave the final punctuation point, “Go, and do likewise.” Indeed, orthodoxy—right belief—is of little value if not mirrored by orthopraxy—right actions. With this insistence on balance between creed and code, Jesus stands in line with the best of Jewish practice, from the Old Testament prophets down to the modern era.

The opposite of this preferred behavior, at least in the imagery of last Sunday’s Gospel, is the doing of nothing when something needed to be done. A-pathy is literally the lack of passion or care. It is the calloused shrug of the shoulder in the face of human need, the sin of omission that says, “I don’t care.” It is seeing a hungry child, and
thinking, “Well it isn’t my child. Besides, where are that child’s
deathparents?” Apathy is seeing injustice, and saying, “I do not
want to get involved. It’s none of my business.” It’s seeing the motorist
on the highway stranded in the snow bank, and pretending not to hear
their cries for help, thinking, “If I stop, I might get stuck too. That’s
what we pay the police for anyway.”

In the earliest days of the Christian Church, the Church Fathers
made a list of the Seven Deadly Sins—you know, anger, lust, greed,
envy—the big sins. And on that list was this very offence--Apathy.
And the Church Fathers were wise to include apathy in this list of the
most heinous sins. As Edmund Burke said, “All it takes for evil to
triumph in the world is for good people to do nothing.”

But what about when it seems that God is standing by doing
nothing? Now that is a thorny question, is it not? A child dies of
cancer, while hundreds of loved ones and Christian friends are holding
round-the-clock vigil, praying for a miracle cure. Doesn’t God care for
that innocent child? Six million European Jews, along with other people deemed inferior by the Nazi regime, were killed in torture camps over a period of years during World War II. Where was God, to allow His chosen people to suffer so? And for these silences of heaven, and others like them, many people have raised a question mark, (or a clinched fist), toward God and asked, “Don’t you care?”

This is a very difficult question, and is a perfectly natural response when we suffer at the hands of humans or from natural disaster. When we are hurting, when we are oppressed, when we are confused, when we are suffering, we cry out to God for aid, to “do something” for us to ease the suffering. And sometimes, our cries and prayers seem to be answered only by thundering silence. Why…, doesn’t God care?

This was a question posed to Jesus from time to time in the Gospel. Jesus had demonstrated the power to calm the seas, but when his disciples were rowing hard against another violent storm, he was asleep in the stern of the boat. They awakened him with the accusation,
“Master, don’t you care that we are about to killed in this storm?” Jesus had demonstrated that he had the power to heal the sick, and even to raise the dead, but when his friend Lazarus was on his deathbed, his sisters called to him in behalf of their brother. And Jesus waited for several days before coming to visit, during which time Lazarus died. The response of Mary and Martha was understandable, “Lord, if you had been here, our brother would not have died.” In other words, “Why didn’t you care enough to come when we called?”

In our Gospel today we hear Jesus accused yet again of “not caring.” This time the accuser is Martha, who was busy providing hospitality to Jesus and his disciples, pounding away at the dough in the kitchen, anxiously fretting over the many details involved in feeding and hosting so many special guests. While all of this frenetic activity was swirling in the kitchen, Martha’s sister Mary was simply camped out at the feet of Jesus, listening and absorbing his words—as if she was a disciple herself! Of course, we can understand Martha’s frustration. Haven’t we all had times when we felt that a sibling, a co-worker, or a
teammate was not carrying their share of the load? How did you feel? Either we complained, or we wanted to complain, right? We echo and understand Martha’s lament, “It’s not fair! Make her help me. Can’t she see, (can’t God see), that I am overworked and under-appreciated?”

Martha probably wanted to hear the conversation in the main room too, but she had plates to prepare, beds to make, and chores to do. Mary had abandoned her post in the kitchen, and her proper place helping Martha attack the “to-do” list. But Martha does not level her accusation and complaint only at her sister. She also sweeps Jesus into her complaint. “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me.”

Isn’t this story, placed here by Saint Luke immediately after the parable of the Good Samaritan, an interesting juxtaposition of truths? In last week’s lesson, it is doing that seems paramount. Get up, do something, go and do likewise. But in this passage of scripture, Luke shows us that doing, even the doing of good deeds, can become an exhausting distraction, if it becomes separated from the source of our
inspiration, even Jesus Christ himself. So Luke calls us back from an over-reading of last week’s lesson, lest we confuse the obedient Christian life as only a continual treadmill of activity. That activity must also be punctuated, grounded, in a continual and consistent quietness at the feet of Christ, if it is to remain obedient, joyous in spirit, and useful for God. In other words, there must be time for \textit{not-doing} too; time for the silent, still, reflective moments of the soul to just \textit{be} in the presence of God. Mary had chosen one of those times. And Jesus made it clear to Martha, and to the frenetic “Martha” that lives in all of us, that he would not take that moment away from Mary.

As with all times when we raise the complaint to God, verbally or just in our heart of hearts, “Don’t you care?”, God’s answer is actually one of enormous care. Jesus loves both of these sisters, just as he loves the way both of these sisters are embodied in each of our lives. And yes, he does care, for both sisters. He values both the doing in the kitchen, and the quiet sitting at his feet. He just wants us to find the balance that allows to both \textbf{do} and \textbf{be} with equal joy, and equal obedience.
Let us come to the altar now, where get the food necessary to *live* that balance.