

SUNDAY 16 – C (Homily 02)

“*Ora et Labora*”

(Gen 18:1-10a; Psalm 15; Col 1:24-28; Luke 10:38-42)

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Have you ever heard the statement: *Ora et Labora*? Do you know what those words mean?

*Ora et Labora* is the motto of many monastic communities. These words mean work and pray, which is how the monks lived out their days, and they summarize the message of the readings for today. We are to root ourselves in prayer, and then spend our lives selflessly in service of one another.

In the first reading from the Old Testament, Abraham, our ancestor in faith, balances prayer and hospitality. In the heat of midday, he is sitting quiet, attentive, in prayer as he relates to God as Trinity and has his prayer for a child answered. Sarah prepares a meal for the surprise guests who appear to them, and together they offer the best of Near East hospitality without any anxiety or stress.

The Gospel is also all about hospitality and prayer, only now the element of anxiety and worry is inserted. Martha is an anxious person, unable to balance prayer and activity, and ends up complaining about her sister Mary who seems to be at the other extreme, neglecting hospitality for prayer and piety. Both together teach us the importance of being like Abraham, able to balance both.

The priority given to Mary by Jesus in the Gospel underlines the critical need for us to ground our activity first in the Word of God, so that we are doing God’s will in serenity, and not just misguidedly doing our will in God’s name.

For his part, St. Paul speaks of the mystery of Christ among us, very much like the strangers who suddenly appear before Abraham. St. Paul adds that the mission of the church is to make the Word known; to live the mystery of Christ among us, like the Trinitarian God of the first reading.

Paul himself is a model of the ideal disciple who like Abraham balances both poles of Christian life – prayer and activity. Paul is rooted in his own

mystical relationship with Christ whom he loves, yet spends his life tirelessly making the word of God known as a mystery living among us.

This challenge to balance prayer and work, *ora et labora*, is always before us. One spiritual writer was frustrated with interruptions to his prayer life until he came to understand that these interruptions *were* his prayer life. He learned to accept them not as interruptions but as invitations to find and serve God within his prayer.

A Franciscan monk, Bob Mitchel, has an interesting insight that applies here and can be helpful. He states that most people lead very active lives, full of activity, into which they at times try to insert moments of prayer. He teaches that it should be the opposite – we are called as disciples of Jesus to be like Mary, living lives of prayer into which we choose to insert different activity. That would free the Martha part of our personality to work and minister with greater peace and serenity.

Two booklets of reflections and commentary on scripture that are available and highlight both aspects of today's readings are *The Word Among Us* (highlighting the need for prayer) and *Living With Christ*, highlighting the need to minister to one another.

Archbishop Emeritus Joe McNeil is an example of a prayerful man who ministered peacefully and well in his archdiocese, and yet had the time to leisurely visit with a young Oblate scholastic who happened to drop by his office to visit the chancellor, a Lay Oblate sister. His peaceful prayerful presence had a lasting effect on that seminarian who went on to become an Oblate priest.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a deep moment of prayer and worship, a moment of intimacy with God that is always connected with the needs of the world and empowers us, not to try to stay on a prayer high, but to translate our experience of God's love into practical work for peace and justice in the world.

So remember, *ora et labora* is not for monks only – it is a challenge that Jesus places before us all everyday as we seek to follow him and live within his kingdom.