

JULY 20 2025 DEACON ROBERT KINGHORN

Well, in that gospel today, we heard about Jesus going on His way to Jerusalem with His disciples, and He stopped to see His great friends, Martha and Mary. Remember? The sisters of Lazarus.

We're told also that Jesus knew this trip to Jerusalem might be His last, that He may die when He gets there. So, we can just picture that scene. Jesus is there with His friends, but He had this worry in His head, and to be honest, the last thing He probably wanted to do was to eat. He was just filled with the anticipation of what might happen in Jerusalem.

There's a fundamental rule in spiritual direction: "We have to meet people where they are, not where we want them to be."

Martha thought it was food that Jesus wanted, but Mary was the one who listened, and she knew what compassion was all about.

I think we do that sometimes. We see someone hurting and we think we know what they want, so we give them something and maybe they reject it, and then we feel hurt by that. But the message today is that we have to, first of all, listen. We have to listen before we talk.

This is what this reading is all about in the gospel today.

Mary was the one who sat at the feet of the Lord and listened to His sorrow and to His fear on the way to Jerusalem. This is who we are called to be as people of the Lord. This is what we have to do. We have to listen to the pain in the world and offer our compassion — compassionate listening.

Perhaps we can even use the sorrow that has hurt us in our life, so that we can change the tears that come from other people and make them holy tears because of our compassionate listening.

Father Henry Nouwen said, "We're all wounded healers." This is the basis of all of our ministry.

I heard of a hospital chaplain who was approached by a man whose son had died. The man said, "Take away my tears, Father. Would you take the tears away?" And he said to him, "I can't take your tears away, but I can change them into holy tears. Holy tears. So you can offer yourself to others in the same situation, and you can be a compassionate listener with them."

So often it's the pain in our life that helps us to reach out to others. Can we use our experience of hurt? Our experience of loneliness in the world? Can we use that to reach out to the poor?

Can we be like Mary, who sat with Jesus in the pain of grief and fear, and say, "I am with you in this. Tell me about it. How do you feel?"

Miraculously, just being present to someone is a healing experience. They know someone cares.

There have often been people on the street who have died, and sometimes I say, "Oh, did I do any good at all?" But then I realize that at least for the last few days and months of their life, they knew they were loved by someone.

I think in many ways, this is the message of today's gospel — why Jesus said, "You listened to me. That was all that I required at this time."

We, also, as we go through life with other people, reaching out to them, reaching out to people in prisons and hospitals to bring them hope, we're called to bring hope, especially in the jubilee year of hope, in a concrete way.

This is what Mary did with Jesus — gave Him that hope, gave Him hope that He had a friend to go with Him on the journey.

We always remember that the Eucharist is food for our journey in life. As we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, whether we receive spiritually or sacramentally, His promise is that He is the one who is with us on the journey. A compassionate presence to listen to our fears, to listen to our hopes, to listen to our dreams, just as Mary did with Jesus.

This is the symbol that we have of life's journey. This food for the journey that Jesus gives us today, spiritually and sacramentally, is a promise that at every moment He will be with us on the journey.

He will listen compassionately to us when we feel no one else is listening. And at each step of the journey, Jesus says to us, "I am with you. Be healed."