

MARTHA ... a woman in a million
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(LUKE 10:38; JOHN 11:20; 12:2)

Dear Martha,

We have fallen in love with you. No, don't blush. We have no wish to embarrass you, and this is no sudden surge of sentiment. Perhaps you did not realize that you were being watched. Possibly you felt a little overshadowed by your more illustrious sister; but all the time, our eyes have followed you. Dear Martha, do not be upset. We think the world of your lovely sister Mary; but if we had to choose between you, there would hardly be a choice. Martha, you have captured our hearts.

Martha, Who Welcomed the Lord-Luke 10: 38

There, dear girl, we feel better now. It took courage to reveal all that was in our hearts; but your smile reassures us. We have not offended; our affection is not unwelcome. Splendid! Martha, we may never have heard of either Mary or Lazarus if you had not first opened your heart and home to Jesus. The Bible declares, " Now it came to pass . . . that Jesus entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house." Why, had the Master not been permitted to proceed along your street, not a member of your family might have been mentioned in God's great Book. What made you do it, Martha? That invitation brought thirteen extra people to lunch, and if certain dignitaries and neighbors crowded in, you had quite a party! You complained that Mary shirked her duty-Sh, don't tell anyone, we would have complained earlier and longer. Dear Martha, we take our hats off to you, for the Master's gentle rebuke corrected you for ever. You never made the same mistake again. Oh Martha, you put us to shame. On an average we would have complained two or three times per day.

Martha, Who Went to the Lord-John 11:20

Yes, you were always the genius in the background. Others at mealtimes said grace, and thanked God for good food. Did they forget that you had cooked it? Dear Martha, so much of God's good food is ruined by bad cooks! First Mary crowded you out, and then Lazarus did likewise. Oh no, we are not complaining. We are glad and thankful that people enthuse over the resurrection of Lazarus; but why are they so blind? You were the only one in the family to retain a balance of faith in those dread days. When your brother was already dead, you said to Jesus Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now-even now-whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee " (John vv. 21, 22). Martha, you are a gem. " Even now, even now," you said; your faith was smiling through the tears. The deepening corruption of a lifeless body was nothing if only Jesus would pray. And yet, Martha, you did not ask Him to do this. Of course you wanted Him to pray, but you never asked; for it might not have been God's will to answer according to your desire. You probably thought the loss of your brother was preferable to anything contrary to the will of God. Your eyes said, " If it be Thy will, Lord. please do it for us; but if not, everything will be all right: we will understand." Oh Martha, you wonderful woman.

Martha, Who Worked for the Lord-John 12:2

" Where is Martha?" they often asked; but ultimately they

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all knew where to find you-in the kitchen. You were not known for your wonderful sermons; you were famous for scones. You were not a specialist in new dresses in which to attend meetings; you were more concerned with a new cloth to spread over the table, and dinners which included the Master's favorite dishes. And when the news came that Simon the Leper intended to entertain the Saviour, you volunteered to help. " And Martha served." Yes, yes, we know that Mary sat and heard thrilling sermons-God bless her! Lazarus, graceful, grateful, good, sat near the Master and quietly worshipped. Yes, God bless him too! They were both enjoying a rare spiritual experience at an ancient Keswick convention-while you worked. You would have loved to hear the stories of grace; it would have been refreshingly wonderful if you could have taken off the apron to share the delights of His ministry. Your smiles revealed the content of your heart. You were working for the Lord. That cup you washed would soon touch His lovely lips; the piece of bread you cut would soon rest in the hand that made the world. Yes, and you went into the kitchen, which that night seemed a bit of heaven. Oh, Martha, we must stop now or you will be laughing at us. When love fills the heart it runs away with the tongue; so dear sister, we are leaving before we appear to be foolish. But listen, we give you fair warning. When we come home to heaven, we shall look for you, and, well-be prepared.

Noah's Ark-in the Bathroom

The Sunday-school lesson had been graphically given; the children were spell-bound as the gifted teacher told once again the immortal story of Noah and the flood. It had been easy to visualize the rising waters; the strange vessel with its load of animals; the landing on Mount Ararat; and the final sacrifice when Noah expressed his gratitude to God. Yes, the lesson had been well told, and even the children appeared to be sorry when the time arrived to go home. It was a dismal day, for the rain lashed the streets, making walks or outdoor play impossible. Wrapping their coats around them, a brother and sister hurried home to re-enact what they had just heard. They agreed to play in the bathroom, for the bath was the logical place for a flood, and the shower could supply the rain. An old box was set afloat on the rising waters, and into it were placed many toy animals. Backwards and forwards the old box was pushed, and the youngsters had a rare time. When the bath was nearly full, the children reluctantly decided it was time for the waters to subside, and the girl gently pulled the plug. Slowly the waters descended, until the Ark came to rest on " Mount Ararat." The game was over! Then the boy remembered that after the flood Noah offered a sacrifice; so he seized one of his sister's toys and suggested it should be burnt as a sacrifice. " Oh, no! " said the girl. " You cannot burn that; it is too good. I want it for myself." Lifting one of her brother's toys, she examined it, and said it would make a wonderful sacrifice because it would burn so well. Resolutely Jimmy refused, and soon both children were arguing fiercely. It was only after a heated discussion that they decided neither had much use for an old toy lamb that had lost two legs, both ears, and had no tail. Mutually satisfied, they said, " We will give this to God, for it's no good anyway, and we shall not want it again."

Possibly some will smile at this story, but is there not a danger that even adults can make the same mistake? Centuries ago David saidneither will I offer burnt-

MARTHA ... a woman in a million offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing . . . " (2 Samuel 24:24). So much of our service, offerings, devotion is second-rate: we give to God that which we do not desire. The divine law states, " Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and running over " (Luke 6:38). Martha, the woman in a million, always gave her best to Christ: and we should emulate her example.

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During my Australian itinerary I visited Parks, in western New South Wales. My host was a genial Baptist elder who had an intriguing grandson. It was no cause for amazement when the child began to show signs of spiritual interest, for his parents and grandparents were fine Christians. The lad loved attending my services, and made no secret of the fact that my stories to children were far better than my sermons! After a Sunday morning service, the old grandfather came home with a beaming face. Obviously something had pleased him, and I was not surprised when he took me aside to say, " Mr. Powell, that kid is some lad. When you announced that the offering would be received, he put his hand into his pocket and brought out the only two coins he had-a penny and a two-shilling piece (one cent and a quarter). First he gripped one coin, and then the other, and it was obvious he was debating which coin should go into the collection. When the deacon passed the plate, the boy was about to give a penny, but suddenly changing his mind and saying, 'Oh well, I suppose He had better have that one,' he put his two shillings on the plate." I liked the way he said, "He had better have that one." Obviously the boy knew his money was being given to Christ, and to offer a mere penny would have seemed unpardonable when a greater gift was possible.

I also knew a boy in New Zealand. When his father gave him a pet sheep, Winstone, with rare business instinct, said, " Dad, is she all mine? And can I have the wool and sell it?" " Yes, my son." When shearing time arrived and the wool was later sold, the boy had difficulty with his arithmetic. He needed help in dividing a difficult sum of money. When his father enquired what it was all about, he was surprised but delighted to know that Winstone wished to give a tenth of his income to God. He knew his father did this, and was determined to follow in Daddy's footsteps.

What shall I give Thee, Master?
Thou Who didst die for me;
Shall I give less of what I possess,
Or shall I give all to Thee?
Jesus, my Lord and Saviour,
Thou hast given all for me;
Thou didst leave Thy home above
To die on Calvary:
Not just a part or half of my heart:
I will give all to Thee.

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