

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her. (Luke 10:38-42)



**The Calmady Children
Sir Thomas Lawrence**

Devotion Written
by Diane
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I first saw this magnificent portrait by the English Romantic artist Sir Thomas Lawrence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on my first visit to New York City when I was about twenty, and it has resonated with me ever since. The subjects of this early nineteenth-century painting are the children of Charles Calmady, a wealthy aristocrat from Devonshire. I love the rich sepia, radiant ivory, and deep rosy hues of the children's skin and clothing, as well as the way they are immersed in light while the background is mostly black, dramatically highlighting the youthful bloom, vitality, and naturalness of the sisters and helping to convey the evident warmth of their relationship. Though they bear a strong resemblance to each other and are dressed alike, the way they present themselves is quite different. The older child, Emily, is neatly groomed, composed, and graceful. She supports her sister lovingly and protectively, leaning in towards her, but not holding her too tight or restraining her. She maintains a steady focus on the younger girl, regarding her with tenderness and affection; perhaps she is also a little bemused by her. Laura Anne, on the other hand, looks considerably less refined and not particularly aware of her appearance, as her dress is falling around her in a haphazard way and her limbs are bent in a somewhat inelegant pose. She is gazing outward toward the artist, away from her sister, with one arm bent inward and the other stretched out casually above her. She looks full of spirit and ready for action, but what form that will take is a mystery, probably even to her, for her eyes reveal a distinct dreamy quality. One gets the impression that she tends to act spontaneously without much forethought. But for now, she seems happy to stay where she is, secure in her sister's embrace.

I imagine that Emily and Laura Anne as adults may well have responded as Martha and Mary did in this account of Jesus' visit to their home in Bethany -- the one still concerned with doing things right and the other still content just to let things flow. Both women clearly adore Jesus and want to please their guest of honor, but in the way they go about their mission, the two sisters could not be more at odds with each other. Martha is frustrated with Mary's lack of attention to what she considers the most pressing need of the moment -- preparing and serving the meal. For Martha, now is obviously not the time for lazing about, it is time for getting things done and she is tired of doing all the work herself. But Mary immediately cuts through all such peripheral concerns and goes right to the spiritual core of the experience. For her, Jesus' material requirement for food pales in comparison to his crucial need for meaningful communication and heart-felt interaction with his closest companions, especially in light of the nefarious forces that are already conspiring against him. For Mary, now is obviously not the time for frenetic activity, it is time for simply loving her Master in the best way she can and she does not want to waste time on non-essential practicalities. She wants to spend their hours together in the soothing warmth of human intimacy, offering one another the understanding, solace, and joy that only friends can give.

Is one personal style really better than another? How would the dreamers survive without the doers to back them up? Are not both temperaments valid and worthwhile approaches to life? Of course they are. And Jesus does not question Martha's devotion to him or her sense of duty. But he says that Mary has "chosen the good part." To communicate our love now to the people we care about rather than wait for a more convenient or propitious time or a more appropriate setting. And to do it freely without reservation, giving our best and not counting the cost, for this may well be our last opportunity.

When we harbor undue worry and anxiety over the future, near or distant, may we remember the blessings of the present. When too many interwoven strands, pulled threads, and loose ends on our daily agenda cause tension and turmoil, may we focus on essentials. When trivialities, setbacks, and minor annoyances rise to the forefront, may we simply let them go. And when we are tempted to judge others harshly, may we view them instead with clarity and compassion. For all our peripheral concerns and negative attitudes drain precious resources and draw us away from you, the true Light of our lives. May we concentrate instead on the life of the spirit: inner serenity, loving relationships, and joyful service. Amen.

Art Reference:

The Calmady Children, 1823

Sir Thomas Lawrence (English, 1769-1830)

Bequest of Collis P. Huntington, 1900 (25.110.1)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

<http://z.about.com/d/arthistory/1/0/t/X/11.jpg>