

Home Retreat, *Vacare Deo*: Suggested Activities for the Day

1. Read (and reflect upon!) the following passage from a Sermon by St Aelred. What might it have to teach you about balance and the need for *otium* in your life?

If therefore, brothers, our soul, as we have said, becomes this castle [castellum - the house where Mary, Martha and Lazarus live], it is important that two women dwell in it: one who sits at the feet of Jesus and listens to his word; the other who serves Jesus and feeds him. Notice, brother! If Mary alone were in this home, there would be no one to feed the Lord; if Martha were alone, there would be no one delighting in the words and presence of the Lord... Therefore, brothers, as long as Christ is poor and walks by foot on the earth and is hungry and thirsty and tempted, it is essential that both these women be in the one house - that is that both these activities be in each soul.

It will sometimes happen that Martha will want to have Mary with her at her work, but this must not be granted her. 'Lord,' she said, 'do you not care that my sister has left me to get on with this work alone? Tell her to help me!' This is a temptation. Notice, therefore brothers, that when, during the time we should be at leisure for *lectio* and prayers, the thought occurs to us that we ought to go to this or that job, as if it were necessary, then, as it were, Martha is calling Mary to help her. But the Lord judges well and justly. He does not order Martha to sit down with Mary, nor does he order Mary to get up and serve with Martha. Mary's role is certainly better and more pleasant and more delightful, yet he does not want Martha's task to be left undone on account of it. Martha's role is more laborious, yet he does not want Mary's to be disturbed. What he desires, therefore, is that both should do their own parts. We must surely do Martha's task at certain times and at certain times Mary's task, unless there intervenes some necessity which knows no law. Therefore, we must punctiliously keep to those times which the Holy Spirit has determined for us: at the time of *lectio* we must stay still and quiet, not yielding to idleness or drowsiness, not departing from Jesus' feet, but sitting there and listening to his word. But when it is time for work we should be alert and ready, and on no account should we neglect the ministry of love in order to obtain quiet. We should never mix the one activity up with the other unless obedience alone - to which we ought never to prefer quiet or work, action or contemplation, or any other things - compels us to leave, as it were, the very feet of Jesus.

2. Spend some time thinking about the last several weeks in your life. Where were the space for holy leisure? What might be stopping you from making time for this very necessary sort of breathing space?
3. Choose one of the following passages from the Gospels of St Mark/St Luke for some *lectio divina*:

Mk1:35-39

And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him followed him, and they found him and said to him, "Every one is searching for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out." And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Mk 2:23-28

One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck ears of grain. And the Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" And he said to them, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; so the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath."

Mk 6:30-32

The apostles returned to Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves.

Lk 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has

left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her."