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-- Those of you who are just a little younger than I am (especially if you're in your 50's) probably remember Marcia Brady of the TV show *The Brady Bunch*. (now in reruns) She was the oldest of three girls.

-- And she was the responsible one. She did almost everything she was supposed to do, usually very well. But there was a nagging feeling that she was missing out on something. And it caused a lot of rivalry with her sisters (and sometimes with the boys in their "blended family").

-- Having four sisters growing up, I can understand this. The oldest of my sisters actually skipped 6<sup>th</sup> grade; she was that smart. I witnessed plenty of sisterly rivalry, occasionally stoking those fires myself, I must admit.

-- This gospel gives us a story of sisterly rivalry, but it teaches lessons all of us, women and men alike, can take to heart. And there's a danger we may misunderstand what it's trying to teach us.

-- Jesus is not putting down Martha's efforts at hospitality. If we read the rest of Luke's gospel, we know Luke values service, especially to the poor and needy. And our first reading shows us that our hospitality toward others is really serving God.

-- Nor is Jesus trying to set Martha against Mary. He is responding to that tendency we have to compare. All too often it leads to one of two things: either we think what we are doing is most important, or we become discouraged at our "failure" and wallow in self-pity. Either way, we are preoccupied with ourselves.

-- Jesus wants to free us from that excessive fretting and worrying about whether others around us are pulling their fair share of the duties. That is a temptation I know very well.

-- He also shows us how not to fall into a trap that all too often is set for us. Notice how Martha, when she's frustrated with Mary's failure to help her, doesn't talk directly to her sister.

-- She complains to Jesus. In fancy language, she “triangulates.” How often do we do this, complaining to someone else instead of the person we should talk to? All too often people try to get me, as a pastor, to do that. The gospel of Matthew also speaks about this.

-- Jesus doesn't take the bait. He's not in the business of mediating rivalries. For Jesus loves both Martha and Mary equally. He values what both of them are doing, the service of hospitality and the call of discipleship.

-- Mary is empowered by Jesus to be a disciple in a culture where women were not supposed to do that. Martha is invited to see the value of discipleship just as there is value in her hospitality.

-- There is plenty we can learn from this personally. All of us need time to be disciples of the Lord in prayer. We also need to do the good work of welcoming people around us. There is some Martha and Mary in all of us, and God appreciates that.

-- There are lessons for the wider world in this gospel as well. We live in a culture of rivalry and violence. This election year seems to magnify those rivalries. We think in terms of “either/or” rather than “both/and.”

-- Yet our name “Catholic” means universal, encompassing all that is good and helpful. We don't choose between faith and good works, prayer and action, unity and diversity. We need all these.

-- Perhaps the sisters in the Brady Bunch could learn a lesson or two from this gospel. In fact, I suspect all of us could do so as well.