

Food for Thought
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Luke 10:42b

(NA 27th ed.)

Μαριάμ γὰρ τὴν ἀγαθὴν μερίδα ἐξελέξατο
ἣτις οὐκ ἀφαιρεθήσεται αὐτῆς.

10:42b (RSV)

Mary has chosen the good portion,
Which shall not be taken away from her.

“Mary” is readily seen in the first word, *Mariam*. You can see “elect” in the last word of line 1, “chosen.” The word of interest at the moment is *merida* (lexical form: *meris*), “portion.” Sometimes English words that have “mer” in them are related to this, such as merism, polymer, and mere.

You know the story. Martha invited Jesus into her home. While she was busy hostessing, her sister Mary sat learning and listening at his feet. Martha finally became so exasperated that she demanded that Jesus instruct Mary to help her. She momentarily forgot to whom she was speaking, and although she called him “Lord,” she issued him an order. Jesus gently rebuked her for being “anxious and troubled” about many things, while neglecting the one thing that was necessary. He said, “Mary has chosen the good *merida*.”

Meris and *meros* mean “portion.” Except perhaps in Luke 24:42, their other occurrences in the New Testament do not help me understand what Jesus meant by the “good portion.” But his meaning becomes clear in the light of the Greek Old Testament. There, often *meris* denotes a portion or morsel of food. For example, in LXX Gen 43:34, Benjamin enjoyed the best *meris* from Joseph’s table.

So how does this relate to our passage? Martha was not the only one with something to dish up that day. Mary was partaking of the best mouthfuls, the finest helpings—better than any cuisine Martha could prepare. In all her fussing about, Martha was missing out on the main course being served under her roof.

The obvious point of the passage is to put a premium on the time that we spend actually listening to the Lord. Our daily chores and needful activities can be a distraction from this. Martha's impulse to place her own activities above Mary's seeming inactivity caused her to miss out on manna from heaven. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). Jesus is the good *meris* which will not be taken from us.

How can we make sure that we aren't distracted like Martha and miss out on Jesus' *meris*? We partake of Jesus' words today through reading the Bible. So in this day and age the passage calls us to set aside time from our busy lives to imbibe God's Word. To apply this passage, why not recommit yourself to do just that?

Remember, to do this you must "repent" of your needful activities and concerns, and intentionally lay down your burdens for a portion of time. This means stepping out in faith and believing that time spent partaking of the solid food of Scripture is not a waste—it is as valuable as caring for the day's needs. (Take this to the logical conclusion and register for online seminary classes!) Martha did not value Mary's quiet attentiveness. But Jesus did—and he values yours.

Give him a try, and enjoy the best *merida* of the day!