

Homily for 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Her name was Henrietta Smithson. She was a famous English actress. The French composer, Hector Berlioz, fell head-over-heels for her as he sat in the theater and watched her perform. He left the theater knowing that peace would never be his until he had realized his true love for Henrietta. He tried to contact her. No luck. He wrote her passionate love letters. She tore them up. He arranged a special concert of his works so that he could impress her. She never showed up. He even rented the room next to hers in the local hotel. She moved out the morning he moved in.

In total defeat Berlioz entered a period of great depression. He even attempted suicide. For several years he was lost in a sea of unrequited love. In this time of despair he composed one the great masterpieces of classical music – the *Symphonie Fantastique*. He dedicated it to Henrietta and arranged for the world premiere concert in such a way that it might attract her attention. She didn't come.

But eventually he won out. While she didn't attend the world premiere, Berlioz got her to attend a second performance. Henrietta, at last, fell in love with the devoted Berlioz. They courted, became engaged

and finally married. Within five years they ended up living apart from each other both wishing they had never met the other.

Be careful what you wish for -- you may get it. We all know that phrase very well. Like it or not, what we wish for determines what and how we live our lives. How many of us spend so much time pursuing and maintaining a certain lifestyle that we end up missing life itself? It reminds me of the cartoon picturing a husband and wife looking at DaVinci's "Last Supper." The man turns to his wife and says: "That reminds me. I have an Administrative Board meeting tomorrow." What's important influences everything and anything that we do.

Jesus notes that Mary has chosen the "better part." What is the "better part" that I have chosen? What is it that motivates the actions of my life? Do I go after those things that give me the fullness of life? Or am I like 95% of Americans who say they hate what they do and derive little or no meaning from their jobs? Do I search after love that calls me to give rather than receive? Does my "better part" see the hand of God in all things and realize the gratitude that I and all creation owe to its loving Creator? Does the love of my family and friends become that "better part" because it is the presence of God made real?

Berlioz nearly destroyed himself in search of what he thought was the "better part." What he thought to be better turned out to be bitter.

The Gospel today suggests that we think carefully about what we want as the “better part.” For whatever we choose determines who we are. And who we are determines the gift of a life that we end up giving back to God. Martha and Mary have much to teach us. Let us not miss the lesson.