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The ability to listen is the root of peace

Vatican City, 17 July 2016 – At midday Pope Francis appeared at the window of his study to pray the Angelus with the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square, as on every Sunday. Before the Marian prayer the Holy Father reflected on the day's Gospel reading, the account of Jesus' visit to the house of Martha and Mary, and the various ways in which each of the women receives their guest. Mary sits at Jesus' feet and listens to him, whereas Martha busies herself in preparing the house. Eventually she asks, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me." Jesus responds, "Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her".

Francis explains that, in busying herself, Martha runs the risk of forgetting – and this is the problem – the presence of her guest, Who in this case is Jesus. A guest does not need to be merely served, fed, and cared for. ... Above all it is necessary that he is listened to. The guest must be welcomed as a person, with his history ... so that he might feel truly at home among family. But if you welcome a guest in your house but continue doing things, if you have him sit down, both of you in silence, it is as if ... the guest were made of stone".

The answer Jesus gives Martha – when he tells her that only one thing is necessary – finds its full meaning with reference to the Word of Jesus Himself, the Word which enlightens and sustains all that we are and all that we do. "For example", continued the Pope, "if we go to pray before a crucifix, and we talk and talk, and then leave, we do not listen to Jesus. We do not allow him to speak to our hearts. Listening is the key word. Do not forget. ... Just as we should not forget that in the house of Martha and Mary, Jesus – before being Lord and Teacher – is a pilgrim and a guest. Therefore, His answer has this first and more immediate significance: 'Martha, Martha, why do you worry so much over the guest that you come to the point of forgetting his presence?' The guest of stone! To welcome him, there is no need for many things, but rather just one thing only: to listen to him, the word, to listen to him, show him a fraternal attitude, so that he feels that he is among family, and not in temporary lodging".

"Understood in this way, hospitality, which is one of the works of mercy, can be seen to be truly a human and Christian virtue, a virtue that in today's world, risks being set aside. Indeed, there is a growing number of guest houses and accommodations, but in these places, one does not always find true hospitality. Many institutions are established to assist in many forms of illness, loneliness, marginalisation, but the likelihood diminishes that a

foreigner or a marginalised, excluded person can find someone willing to listen to him ... to his sorrowful story. Even in one's own home, among one's own family, it is easier to find service and care of various types rather than listening and acceptance".

"Today we are so busy and in such a hurry, with so many problems, some of which are not important, that we lack the capacity to listen", warned the Holy Father. "We are constantly busy and so we do not have the time to listen. I would like to ask each one of you to answer in your heart: You, husband, do you have time to listen to your wife? You, wife, do you have time to listen to your husband? You, parents, do you have time, time to spend to listen to your children, or your grandparents, the elderly? ... Listen. I ask you to learn to listen and dedicate more time to this. In the capacity to listen is the root of peace".
