The Better Part

by Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer

A blog writer named John Sowers described visiting an aquarium with his young daughters who love fish the way other kids love puppies. His girls ran to the entrance of the building as though a Christmas tree with a hundred gifts waited inside just for them.

Stepping inside was like landing on Venus. Transfixed by wonder, they leaned back to gaze at the bellies of sharks, they were hypnotized by the flapping wings of stingrays, they stood frozen in place by a wall of blue coral.

But this was not the father's experience. He grew impatient shuffling his family from one display to another. Watching his daughters lost in wonder and amazement, he realized that, somewhere along the way, he'd gone tone deaf and was no longer able to hear the Great Music of God's creation.

When did it happen? he asked himself. What made him so jaded, cynical and negative? Was it broken relationships? Or the frantic pace of life itself, reacting to one crisis to crisis? Then, he asked himself the most troubling question of all: Once someone stops hearing the music, can they ever hear it again?

I wonder if Martha, in the Gospel of St. Luke, asked herself the same question as she dried the dishes and put them in the cupboard after Jesus had dined at her house and gone home. She must have realized that, like this father at the aquarium, she, too, had missed the music. Anxious and irritable about the details of hospitality, she'd missed the concert while her sister, Mary, had enjoyed a front row seat.

How different would be our experience of life if we were fully open to all that it offers. If, like Mary sitting at the feet the Lord or like children exploring the wonders of an aquarium, we could simply receive the gift of life with gratitude and joy.

"Mary has chosen the better part," said the Lord.

And that's where it begins. Where personal conversion always begins: Sitting at the feet of Christ and hanging on his every word. Like a child gazing at a reef of yellow coral and silvery, shimmering fish.