

No Reservations (2007)

Rated PG. Our ratings: V- 1; L- 2; S/N – 2. Running time: 1 hour 43 min.

*But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things...
Luke 10:41a*

Director Scott Hicks does a better job remaking the 2001 German film *Mostly Martha* than do most Americans who raid the treasury of European film fare, doomed to the art house circuit because of American audiences' distaste for subtitles. Screenwriter Carol Fuchs stays close to the original script, even using much of its dialogue, though inserting several changes that actually enhance the story. However, for some reason the name of the heroine in the German film is changed (along with other major characters)—which for Christians is too bad, in that Martha the celebrity chef is very much like the Martha, the sister of Mary in the story of the Gospel of Luke, her life tied to the kitchen.

Catherine Zeta-Jones as the *No Reservations* celebrity chef Kate and Aaron Eckhart as Nick, the admirer who comes to work in the kitchen because he wants to learn from her, are both very appealing. In the German film Nick is named Mario, a passionate Italian who brings zest and spontaneity into the orderly but glum kitchen. Nick is from Miami and his passion for Italian cuisine comes from the time he spent in Italy working in a restaurant while wooing an Italian woman.

When Kate's sister dies in a car crash, Kate becomes the guardian of her young niece Zoe (Abigail Breslin), which complicates her rigidly scheduled life, as does Nick's presence at the restaurant, which she resents, and also fears because she thinks that he might be after her position. Kate struggles to meet the girl's emotional needs, but she is unable to get the withdrawn Zoe to even eat a whole meal. The scene in which Nick indirectly draws out the girl so that she is soon eating the bowl of spaghetti that he leaves beside her is a jewel. Soon it is Zoe who is bringing Kate and Nick together, though there are many bumps in the road ahead for them all. This is a charming story of character transformation set amidst some colorful shots of glorious food.

For Reflection/Discussion

May contain spoilers near the end.

- 1) What is the mood in the kitchen and at the staff/planning meals when we first meet Kate? How does she seem like the Martha in Luke's story?
- 2) What does Zoe bring into Martha's life that was lacking before? Concern and responsibility for another? The intrusion of another upon her solitude? What does Zoe's name mean, and how is this symbolic in regard to Kate?
- 3) What does Nick bring into Kate's life? Warmth; spontaneity; joy; concern for others?
- 4) Both film versions include Kate/Martha's sessions with her therapist: what do these add to the story? What do they reveal about the chef?
- 5) Why do you think Kate would be fearful about Nick's motivation for coming to work in "her" kitchen? A sign of her insecurity?
- 6) What traits in Martha or Nick do you find in yourself?

7) Think about this exchange between Kate and Nick: "You don't understand! This place is my life. This is what I am?" To which Nick replies, No—it is only a part of you." How is Kate like so many people who find their identity or purpose in life in their job? How do Nick (and Zoe) help her to move beyond such a view of herself? Have you felt this way about your work, so that vacations become something to put up with until you can get back to work? How can our understanding of our baptism into Christ lead us into seeing that our life is more than our work?

8) A nice touch in the new version are peacock feathers. When or where do we first see them? Later in the film what does Zoe do with them? What does the peacock symbolize in Christian art? Why then is it appropriate that Zoe places them on her mother's grave?