

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time “C” Cycle July 16-17, 2016

When I make pastoral visits to families, even Communion calls, I am often offered something to drink or eat or given something to take with me. This invitation of hospitality is appreciated even if I can only stay a few minutes. Hospitality derives from the Latin word for guest. It means the cordial and generous reception of and treatment of visitors. The word “hospital” is also a derivative. Guests are usually people with whom we are acquainted but it can be and is often extended to others.

The theme of the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament reading and the Gospel highlights the virtue of hospitality.

In the 1st reading, from the Book of Genesis, Abraham encounters three travelers, to whom he extends extravagant hospitality, suspecting that they were somehow significant. Commentators surmise that it was an appearance of God or messenger angels. Some are even of the opinion that the three travelers represent the Blessed Trinity. The 15th century Russian artist, Andrew Rublev, did a painting or icon of this scene, a copy of which is displayed in the Narthex.

Abraham and his wife Sarah are blessed for their hospitality in the promise by their guests that a son would be born to them. Both were advanced in years and troubled that they were childless. The son who was born, Isaac, continues the line of God’s chosen people. God was faithful to his promise that Abraham would have many descendants.

In the Gospel, from St. Luke, the sisters, Martha and Mary of Bethany, both provide Jesus with hospitality. They clash however over how to provide hospitality. Martha complains to Jesus about having to attend to all the dinner preparations, whereas Mary is content to keep Jesus company. When Martha brings her complaint to Jesus, he apparently sides with Mary, telling Martha that she is overly anxious and worried and that Mary has chosen the better part of simply staying with him.

There are several important points to understand and apply the Gospel message to our practice of faith.

1. It follows right after the story of the Good Samaritan, proclaimed in last week's Gospel, which stressed active concern for one's neighbor. St. Luke is giving Jesus' balanced teaching about action, helping and serving others, and prayerful contemplation.

2. In Jesus' time and even today in Orthodox Jewish practice, women were not welcomed as disciples. As we know Jesus welcomed women and children, as well as men, to be his disciples. Some of his most loyal disciples, in fact were women, Mary his mother, Mary Magdalene, the women present at his crucifixion when most of his apostles fled. Throughout Church history, there have been many saintly women disciples such as Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, Therese of Lisieux, Katherine Drexel, and soon to be canonized Mother Theresa of Calcutta.

3. No matter how busy we may be about important matters, we need always to be attentive, to be simply present to others: to our spouses and children and parents in respectful conversations. This is basic hospitality. We also need to be present and hospitable to God in prayer. It is important to schedule definite time for prayer each day even for a few minutes. To not schedule it is to schedule it out.

We must also remember that the Lord first extends hospitality to us, inviting us to a personal loving relationship with him, especially at the Holy Eucharist. He is our gracious Host. May we be his responsive and grateful guests. Just as he blessed Abraham, Sarah, Martha, and Mary, he will surely bless and reward us.