

Welcomes and showing hospitality, or their opposites, are much in the news these days with the refugee and illegal immigrants crises here and abroad. It is a challenge to a town or city or whole country inundated with people in desperate need of housing, clothing, food, and safety to provide these basic needs for them. Governments and political parties and groups here and abroad have different solutions for these problems. One is to close the borders, build high walls, and deport people who are in the country illegally. Others propose to let the honest, law-abiding ones stay, with possibilities for them in time to enjoy all the rights of citizenship.

In today's scriptures we heard two stories relating to hospitality, one for strangers, the other for a friend. Abraham and Sarah both became very busy showing hospitality to the three strangers. Abraham must have been still a vigorous man since the story says he **ran** to greet them, **hastened** to the tent to tell Sarah "Quick, make the rolls", and **ran** to the herd to pick out the steer to be slaughtered. He himself waited on them under the shade tree. The guests rewarded their hosts with the promise that before the end of the year Sarah, barren and beyond child-bearing age till then, would have a son. This is the back story for the comment of the author of the letter to the Hebrews: "Do not neglect to show hospitality, for by that means some have entertained angels, without knowing it."(13.2)

Martha could not have known that she was entertaining the Son of God when Jesus came to visit. We heard that Martha welcomed Jesus into her family home. But then she felt burdened with much preparation and serving all by herself. She complained, Why didn't Mary help her. I think anyone who has been involved in preparing a dinner party for guests in the home can sympathize with Martha. It makes a big difference when everyone pitches in to help with the preparations so that everyone has a chance to enjoy the time with the guests. One difference in the stories is that Abraham regarded it a privilege to attend to all the needs of his guests, while Martha found it laborious.

When Jesus was the invited guest of a leading Pharisee, he proposed to his host and other guests this challenging way of hospitality: "Whenever you give a lunch or dinner, do not invite your friends or brothers of relative or wealthy neighbors. They might invite you in return and thus repay you. No, when you have a reception, invite beggars and the crippled, the lame and the blind. You should be pleased that they cannot repay you for you will be paid in the resurrection of the just." (Lk 14: 12 seq.)

St. Benedict wrote a long chapter On the Reception of Guests in his Rule. He reminded his monks: "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.... The abbot make break his fast for the sake of a guest... Greatest care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received; our very awe of the rich guarantees them special respect."

All of these reflections on hospitality on the human scale are but a faint image of the hospitality we are experiencing as we return to the altar. Jesus is our host in more than one way. That last night before his passion, he said to his apostles, "I have longed to eat this Passover meal with you." He is saying the same to all who long for life and believe his word. It is written in the book of Proverbs that Wisdom calls from the heights over the city "Come, eat of my food and drink of the wine I have mixed." Jesus, being as St. Paul says the power and the Wisdom of God, has prepared his own body and blood as our viaticum, food for our journey home.

We are those poor, crippled, lame and blind by our sinning who cannot repay the Lord equally for his goodness to us. But in another sense we can, by being generous and merciful in the way we treat and welcome the strangers, the outcasts, the foreigners that we encounter in different

ways in our pilgrim journey. “What you do to the least of my little ones you do to me,” said Jesus. What we receive as a gift, we are to give as a gift. To our Host Jesus, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be praise honor and obedient love now and forever. AMEN