

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Hospitality Grows and Nurtured in our Friendship with Jesus

Genesis 18:1-10a; Psalm 15:2-3,3-4,5; Colossians 1:24-28; Luke 10:38-42

Dear family and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Church,

Greetings in the Lord!

Hospitality is one of the Four Pillars of our Parish Pastoral Plan. We understand hospitality as encountering Christ in ourselves and every person we meet. We dream of fostering the culture of encounter by being welcoming and breaking down the walls that divide us to connect people of different cultures with one another. It starts within ourselves.

Christian hospitality means caring for others, always seeing their needs, and always stepping up to help. It is what we learned from the parable of the Good Samaritan last Sunday's Gospel (cf Lk 10:25-37). We remember the scholar of the law asked our Lord Jesus, "who is my neighbor," and his answer was the story of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan showed himself what it is to be a neighbor – helping the person in need, attending and bandaging the wounds, giving shelter, and sharing one's treasure. Our Lord Jesus changes the attitude from "who is my neighbor" to "I am a neighbor." Discernibly, Jesus is a perfect example of this; he rescues us from evil on the road of life, bandages and heals the wounds of sin, shelters us under his Church and Holy Sacraments, and bequeaths unto us as heirs to the Kingdom of God.

Our Christian hospitality is imbued with the spirit of Jesus, and it is the hospitality that saves. A hospitable person always makes himself a good neighbor and treats each person as a guest. Hence, its root word in Latin, "hospes," means "host and guest." It could not be possible to be a good neighbor by not being hospitable. Hospitality is the heart of being a good neighbor to all. Someone said that being hospitable has a positive effect on our physical and emotional health. It increases self-esteem, decreases stress and depression, and boosts our immune system. They are immediate blessings for being hospitable; besides, people may forget what you said, forget what you did, but will never forget how you made them feel.

We have two parallel stories of hospitality: one that happened in the mountain of Mamre and the other in the village of Bethany, respectively, from the first reading and the Gospel.

We learned that Abraham and Sarah welcomed the three strangers to their abode and provided them with food and shelter. Their faith in God nurtures such a welcoming attitude. Little did they know that the heavenly beings were the ones who visited them, and because of their hospitality, they were rewarded. Sarah, who was barren and old, conceived a son! What an incredible blessing! This tells us that divine visitation happens in the ordinary means; it is an encounter in the ordinary like a stranger we met or someone in need of help. And the hospitality we render to someone will not go unnoticed; there is always a reward. Jesus said, "whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink—amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward" (cf. Matt 10:42). There is a blessing for being hospitable!

On the other hand, the hospitality that happened in the village of Bethany was nurtured and grew in friendship. Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus are close family friends of Jesus. They live in the town of Bethany, a stone's throw away from Jerusalem. Accordingly, Jesus may have used to stop by their house before going to Jerusalem. One could notice the closeness of the family with Jesus through the gestures and dialogue. It's casual, honest, and friendly. Martha, inundated with the work in the kitchen, honestly expressed her concern to Jesus, "Lord, do you not care that my sister left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me" (Lk 10:40). She would not tell Jesus this way if he is not a close friend, and who would not understand her complaint if all she wants is to give the best hospitality to her guests? Yes, she seemed to be anxious at the moment.

Jesus, a dear friend, must have smiled while looking at and listening to Martha's complaint. We heard him say, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is a need for only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from her" (Lk 10:41-42). We must understand that this response of Jesus did not discredit Martha's legitimate concern. He did not take it lightly, but he made it an occasion to teach the beauty of friendship. He made Mary's disposition an ideal of friendship. Friendship is always the gift of our being. It is not what you have offered but how much you give your time, presence, and attention, and in their absence, friendship is at risk, weakens, or dies. Hence, the value of friendship is not on material things. It is an encounter from person to person, celebrating each other's being. You can buy friends and multiply them with material gifts, but you will never win their hearts and genuine loyalty.

Our Lord Jesus profoundly reminded Martha and us of the sublime beauty of friendship that we sometimes failed to observe: the value of presence, time, and attention. These are profound expressions of our being, and they are inseparable, the "one thing" that the Lord recognizes as the "better part" and that "should not be taken away" from our daily lives.

Our intimate friendship with God is the one thing that continues until eternity while our works or ministries will be terminated. St. Gregory beautifully summed up this story of Martha and Mary. He said, "Martha signifies the active life as she busily labors to honor Christ through her work. Mary exemplifies the contemplative life as she sits attentively to listen and learn from Christ. While both activities are essential to Christian living, the latter is greater than the former. In heaven, the active life terminates, while the contemplative life reaches its perfection."

Our lives as friends of Jesus flow from the "one thing" that is not to be taken for granted, undervalued, or disregarded but must be practiced. It is where hospitality is nurtured and grown and where we draw the strength of Jesus Christ to welcome others and break the walls that divide us.

God bless you!

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor