

## **HOMILY for 16<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C**

In a snobbish, upscale church, an old biker in well-known boots, jeans, and leather jacket took a seat, only to find that the nattily dressed members of the congregation moved away from him. Throughout the service, the biker felt their looks of disapproval.

Afterward, an usher approached the visitor and said, “Sir, please have a talk with God before you come back. Ask Him what He thinks would be appropriate attire for attending our worship service.”

The biker returned the following Sunday in his boots, jeans, and leather jacket again. The same usher found the man and said, “I thought I asked you to speak to the Lord before you came back to our church here.”

“I did,” the visitor replied. “He said He doesn’t have a clue as to what I should wear here. He’s never been here Himself!”

Anyway, we all want to be welcomed on coming to a place. We love to be acknowledged & warmly greeted by our hosts. That’s why many churches & stores have greeters at entrances to welcome guests & make them feel at home. But, we’re not the only ones who see the importance of making our guests feel welcomed. Both of this Sunday’s readings remind us of this important virtue & call us to practice it every day.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Reading, we learn that Abraham saw three strangers pass by his tent on a hot summer day. They must have been tired & hungry. Abraham did not close the doors to his home & drive away his guests. Instead, he bowed to them & extended this welcome, “Sir, if I may ask you this favor, please do not go on past your servant. Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, & then rest yourselves under the tree. Now that you have come this close to your servant, let me bring you a little food that you may refresh yourselves; & afterward you may go on your way.” I don’t know about you, but that warm greeting of Abraham really touches me & makes me feel welcomed at his home. That’s exactly how his guests felt & decided to linger at his home a bit longer. Along with his wife Sarah, Abraham fed & refreshed their guests. They must have felt warmly welcomed & indebted to these hospitable hosts. They wanted to do something to give back to this kind, generous, elderly couple. One of them made this wish & blessing on the couple, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, & Sarah will then have a son.” For this elderly couple, if that blessing comes true, it’d be a miracle. For they were advanced in years & could not have their own child. But, a miracle was exactly what they would experience. The elderly couple was blessed with their son Isaac in old age.

We can learn a lot from this story about hospitality. This elderly couple can teach our current generation a lesson or two about the virtue of hospitality. For some reason, our current generation cannot reach out to people in need & practice the virtue of hospitality like people back then. We have a lot more blessings than they used to; but we’ve become much stingy & less willing to help out & give generously to people in need. America is the richest country in the world, but it struggles to take care of its poor citizens & welcome strangers from other devastating countries. What we need to do is to have a generous heart & learn to put our faith in God as we try to reach out to people in need & practice the virtue of hospitality every day. That’s how Abraham & Sarah did as they welcomed three strangers in need. They simply put their faith in God & practiced the virtue of hospitality as God taught them. Best of all, they did

not expect anything in return. Because of their hospitality & generous heart, God repaid them with a miracle – something better than any material-possession reward. They were blessed with a child in their old age to continue their family lineage & help God’s promise to make their descendants abundant like stars in the sky & sand on the shore come true. In fact, they had met God through their experience of being hospitable to people in need.

Now, let’s move on to another story about hospitality in today’s Gospel. Evidently Jesus went to the home of his three good friends: Martha, Mary, & Lazarus. Martha was completely focused on the details of hospitality. She wanted Jesus to feel welcomed & get his sister to help out a little more in the kitchen. She expressed her frustration with Jesus as following, “Lord, are you not concerned that my sister has left me all alone to do the household tasks? Tell her to help me.” I’m sure many of us could relate to Martha because we have been under pressure to take care of the details of hospitality before. We want our guests to feel welcomed & wish to come back again. We hope that everything would go perfect at our event & we’ll be remembered as a good host. That was the expectation that Martha had to live up to.

Jesus sympathized with Martha & tried to console her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious & upset about many things; one thing only is required. Mary has chosen the better portion & she shall not be deprived of it.” I don’t know about you, but over the years people have tried to figure out what Jesus meant. Some thought that Jesus might have suggested to throw the details of hospitality out of the window & simply focus on the important guest like Him. That sure makes sense. If Jesus shows up at our party, we all would pick Him over other guests & keep Him company instead. Others assume that Jesus might have tried to help Martha see that the best way to show hospitality to her guest is not to neglect her guest & worry about all the mundane things. None of us wants to invite our guest to a party & then leaves him/her all by himself/herself while we’re busy doing something else. That would not make our guest feel welcomed & special at all.

Surely Jesus does not tell Martha & us to forget about the whole virtue of hospitality. For hospitality is an important virtue in a caring & respectful society. It shows us our warm welcome & appreciation for the guest. Without hospitality, our world would be a cold & unfriendly place. Also, Jesus wants Martha & us to realize that true hospitality is not just about exterior actions. Rather, it’s about giving the guest our whole focus & attention. If we get distracted on doing something else, our guest will not feel quite welcomed. So, true hospitality is about focusing on our guest without any distraction.

My dear brothers & sisters, our modern society often brags about its advance in science & technology. It also strives hard every day to make more money & discover more new things about our human life. But, it neglects the simplest virtue that makes us all feel good & connects us with one another. This Sunday we’re reminded to practice & share with one another that virtue – hospitality - every day. Without hospitality, our world will surely be a cold & unfriendly place. If we practice the virtue of hospitality well, we’ll turn our society into a warm & friendly place. And if we really live & breathe the virtue of hospitality, we might meet God & experience miracles like Abraham & Sarah did.