

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2010

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of hospitality. They invite us to discover the blessing that comes with Christian hospitality for both the guest and the host. Most importantly, they invite us to the exercise of hospitality as a response of faith to the law of charity.

The first reading describes what Abraham did as he welcomed three strangers who came to his home. They show us how he was motivated by his faith in God and the eagerness to practice charity. Thanks to his hospitality, Abraham will be rewarded because, according to the word of these mysterious travelers, his wife Sarah will conceive and have a son.

The first thing the text wants to teach us is about the generosity of Abraham and how he was able to give without counting the cost. It wants also to teach us something about God's mystery, how he is able to visit us, sometimes under human appearances, and at the time we least expect. For that reason, we have to be open to anybody in need. We have to open our hearts and hands especially to the poor and the needy. Through them God begs our hospitality and charity as he did with Abraham. Because God is hidden in these peoples, in helping them, it is God himself we help.

The good news in all this is that anything of what we do in the name of our faith will never remain without recompense. Our eagerness to give generously and to serve our brothers and sisters is always a source of blessing from God. For that reason, we should never regret a good deed, even when those for whom we have done it do not show their appreciation. Abraham learned it to his joy, as his wife Sarah conceived a son in her old age. In other words, when in the name of our faith, we come to the help of those in need, God is able to give back to us a hundredfold. The gratuitous hospitality of Abraham is the symbol of all forms of service to our fellows, but through which God rewards us.

This text helps understand what is at stake in today's Gospel. First of all, we have these two beautiful sisters, Mary and Martha, who welcome Jesus to their home. Then, we have the reaction of Jesus with regard to what they both do.

From the outset, the Gospel shows the two sisters in different postures before Jesus. While Martha is busy with cooking and caring for food, Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him. Instead of opposing the two sisters, as though Jesus loved Mary for her passivity, and disliked Martha for her activity, let us see in them two different temperaments.

We are all different and not alike; but we complete each other. Some people are naturally full of activities; others are naturally quiet. There is nothing wrong in being who we are. That one may sit in silence and pray, and another may run and serve the Lord; it is all right. Both are serving the same God, but each one in her own way. God needs his Marys as well as his Marthas. We need the Marys, but we need the Marthas, too.

As you can realize, this Gospel is not about Jesus scolding the workers and praising the lazy-bones. If Martha is rebuked, indeed, it is not because of her work, but because she is anxious

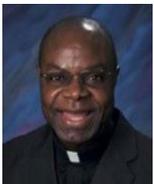
and worried about many things. She engages in work before listening to the word. In other words, the word of Jesus is an important source of strength for those who commit themselves to serve their brothers and sisters and provide the hospitality. When drained by the burden of harsh labors, where can they find strength to energize themselves than in the word of Jesus contained in the Gospel?

Of course, Mary is praised by Jesus, but it is not because she is idle and appears not to see the burden of her sister in the kitchen. When Martha complained to Jesus about her sister, Jesus does not say that Martha was wrong to remind her sister of her commitments, nor does he encourage a lazy attitude in Mary. He only says that the most important thing is to listen to his word.

Why is the listening to the word so important? For Jesus, and that is really true, when people engage in work without listening to the word first, there is a risk of turning their activity into activism. At the end they are so consumed with it that they are anxious, confused, worried and nervous at the least difficulty. The word of Jesus, on the contrary, energizes and gives another dimension to our work. After all, as says the psalmist, “if the Lord does not build the house, the work of the builders is useless; if the Lord does not protect the city, it does no good for the sentries to stand guard” (Ps 127, 1).

The awareness that the fruits of our work come from God’s blessing provokes the sentiment of gratitude and the prayer of thanksgiving toward God who keeps us in good shape and blesses the work of our hands. If someone works within such a spirit, he can assume the difficulties of his work with joy, as a participation in the bettering of God’s creation, the improvement of the life of his fellow humans and the well-being of his own.

We find a model of such a spirit in St Paul. We all know how St Paul has worked totally and selflessly for the Church. However, in spite of all the sufferings he has endured, St Paul feels quite happy because he knows that he has dedicated all his life to a noble cause, which is the Gospel. With joy he has given the best of himself to admonish, to teach everyone with wisdom, and to bring each one to perfection in Jesus. May his example stimulate us! May the Lord Jesus bring each one of us to give the best of ourselves to the service of our fellow humans for the glory of God and our well-being! May we not forget the hospitality that brings God’s blessing upon us! God bless you all!



Homily Date: July 18, 2010

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Document Name: 20100718homily.pdf

Genesis 18, 1-10a; Colossians 1, 24-28; Luke 10, 38-42