

16TH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE C
Genesis 18: 1-10 + Psalm 15 + Colossian 1: 24-28 + Luke 10: 38-42
Holy Spirit Church: July 21, 2019

We know from the opening verse of today's 1st reading that the Lord God, under the disguise of the stranger, is visiting Abraham. But Abraham is not aware that it is the Lord God visiting him until the end of this encounter. He simply performs the customary hospitality which is part of life in the Middle East.

However, Abraham goes beyond what is customary to prepare a feast for these three strangers, who in some interpretations represent the Trinity, the Triune God.

With his wife, Sarah's help, he feeds these strangers fresh homemade bread and fresh meat—the best steak possible—a sign of extravagant hospitality!

Abraham could have reacted in fear to these three strangers and rejected them. Or he could have simply hid away for a while and ignored them. But Abraham chose to receive them with love, and in doing, so received the Lord God. The gift of life he shared he would receive back a hundredfold in the promise of new life giving to barren Sarah and him--- a long awaited son would soon be theirs.

Martha and Mary welcome the Son of God in disguise as he visits their home. Under the disguise of the hungry visitor, the Son of God enters the home of Mary and Martha.

Mary has a sense of the divine presence in Jesus, so she sits at his feet to soak in his words and bask in his loving presence. Now from Abraham and Sarah's example, we know this is not the typical kind of Middle Eastern hospitality.

On the other hand, by preparing the meal, Martha is doing what is expected. However, she is not focused on welcoming the stranger, but on her lazy sister. Jesus does not criticize Martha for her good work—it is important--- In fact, I suspect she is a very good cook and Jesus enjoys the meals she prepares. Jesus points out to Martha that she feels burdened and anxious because she is not focusing on Him.

She is not bringing her burdens to Him, but focused only on what Mary is not doing. Martha is anxious because all her thoughts and energy are focused on “lazy” Mary. In effect, Jesus’ response to Martha is “Pay attention to yourself, Martha, not to Mary, and pay attention to me---give me your whole heart and mind and strength in preparing the meal.”

I think if Martha would have invited Jesus to help her, he would have gladly joined her in the kitchen, and Mary would have joined them. All three would have been in the kitchen sharing life with each other. The only thing Jesus wants is be with Martha in everything, to have her invite Him to be with her in her work and her play, her rest and her rising.

We are to invite Jesus into every part of our lives.
We are to welcome him in every person who touches our lives, especially in the stranger.

Blessed Stanley Rother, whose feast day we celebrate next Sunday, did this. He left his native Oklahoma to live thousands of miles away in Guatemala, loving Jesus present in the stranger in Santiago Atitlan. Fr. Rother did this in a simple yet profound way by sharing meals with his people in their homes. He became the presence of God to them by breaking bread with them at their tables.

Every time Fr. Rother went to a parishioner’s home to eat he knew he would be sick afterward, because they could not sanitize their food, and he would suffer as a result. But he rejoiced in his suffering, because it was a redemptive suffering, a suffering in love of the other, so he would go again and again to share meals with his people.

Fr. Rother gave his life away to his people day after day, so the natural consequence was for him to give his life fully for them in his martyrdom. His death was the result of a life poured out in loving God living in the stranger.

Now the people of Guatemala are coming here in great need.
With Blessed Stanley Rother’s help, can we welcome Christ in them?

Loving one’s neighbor means pursuing what is best for the other before pursuing what is best for oneself.

Abbot Benedict of Conception Abbey, Missouri, in an article last year in the quarterly publication of *Tower Topics*, writes how the Rule of Benedict calls this kind of loving “good zeal” or “the way to God.”

Abbot Benedict points out that the way to God begins with showing respect to one another, supporting one another in weakness, and pursuing what is best for the other.

He explains that hospitality and charity toward others leads to fruitful prayer and contemplation.

In other words, love of neighbor leads to love of God in prayer, which is why I believe St. Luke placed the Parable of the Good Samaritan immediately before this encounter between Jesus and Mary and Martha.

There are many methods and books available about prayer.

But those methods will not be fruitful unless we are seeking to love our neighbor.

The Son of God, the stranger from another world who has made our world his home, sits down at table with us here.

We welcome him as our guest, but actually he is always the Host of this meal.

Thus one of the words for the bread which becomes the body of Christ--the HOST.

He comes to satisfy our hunger, to take away our fear.

He comes with His peace to lift the burden of our worries and anxieties.

He will be our strength and our guide on our own journey to the new Jerusalem.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi