

From the desk of Sister Mary Barbara...

“Be hospitable to one another...”

The readings for this weekend invite us to reflect on the virtue of hospitality. We do not often think of hospitality as being a virtue but it is tied closely to generosity, openness and being welcoming. Throughout both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, hospitality is held in great esteem. In the Hebrew Scriptures before the time of Jesus, we see that the Israelites belonged to nomadic tribes, many dwelling in desert regions. The necessity of hospitality could not be overemphasized since people travelled great distances through the desert and depended on people taking them in to feed and shelter them against the elements. It was a matter of survival. We hear this in today's first reading from Genesis when Abraham invites three travelers to stay with him.

In the Christians Scriptures we often read how Jesus depended on the hospitality of others, such as Martha and Mary, since he had no home and was frequently a guest.

Jesus feels so strongly about hospitality that he tells his disciples that if they are not welcomed in a house or town, they are to shake the dust from their feet and move on to another house or town. (Mt. 10:14). St. Paul, as well, depended on the hospitality of others as he journeyed throughout the known world to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. He often stayed at the home of friends or acquaintances who fed and sheltered him. Many references to hospitality are made in the New Testament writings:

“Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality...” (Rm. 12:13).

“Be hospitable to one another without complaining...” (1Pt. 4:9).

In reflecting on today's gospel reading from Luke, Martha often gets a bad rap because it seems Jesus is castigating her for being too busy. But if we read the passage carefully we see that it was Martha who welcomed Jesus. Also, after her brother Lazarus dies, Martha is the one who comes out to greet and welcome Jesus at the edge of town. It is also Martha who sees to Jesus' physical needs. And it is Martha who acknowledges that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. I think what Jesus wants from Martha is for her to take time to be with her guest and to listen to what he has to say. It would be like one of us being invited to someone's house and the host spending all her time in the kitchen preparing a meal and not sitting down listening and visiting with us. People who are hospitable make us feel important and loved because they are welcoming and open.

Opportunities to be hospitable abound for us on a daily basis: at a grocery store, at home with our family and friends and even among strangers as we heard in last Sunday's gospel story of the Good Samaritan. At St. Mary of Vernon we are surrounded by people of hospitality: being greeted and welcomed at the entrance of the church, being ushered to communion, giving and receiving the sign of peace; hospitality weekend, P.A.D.S., soup kitchen and ministry of care are

all ministries of hospitality. We not only serve but we listen and are attentive to the needs of others.

Jesus is our greatest model of hospitality. Jesus invites us to approach the table of the Eucharist. It is here that Jesus is our host who serves and feeds us on His Body and Blood as well as on His Word in Scripture. As disciples, we are called to be people of hospitality: attentive, generous, open and welcoming to all. One of my favorite passages in Scripture comes from the Letter to the Hebrews: “Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels” (Hb. 13:3). This is a reminder to us to have an open, welcoming and generous heart because we truly do meet Christ in one another.