

## HOMILY – 13<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME “A” 2020

Hospitality is a beautiful form of kindness. We have all been recipients of hospitality at one time or another. It is so special to be made welcome, of having individuals looking after our needs, of eating good food and drink, of being invited to share in the life of our hosts for a while. True hospitality is a beautiful human experience that brings blessings both to the person who receives it and to the one who practices it.

The first reading we heard today is a story about hospitality. It focuses on the relationship that developed between the prophet Elisha and a woman in a town named Shunem. The woman was probably not an Israelite – and normally would have done nothing to help the prophet. But she recognized in Elisha that he was a holy man. She convinced her husband to offer hospitality to this man of God. After Elisha accepted an offering of a meal, the woman urged her husband to provide him with a permanent place to stay when he passed that way on his travels. Elisha was so grateful for this hospitality that he announced God’s special blessing on their household in the form of a son to be born.

Jesus says to all his followers: **“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me.”** When we are hospitable to one another, we too receive a son, but not a son of our flesh and blood. We receive the eternal Son of God the Father. When we reach out to others, we reach out to Christ himself.

There is a wonderful truth that is the foundation of our Christian faith: love for others is actually love for Christ. There is a wonderful story about Saint Martin of Tours. He is generally considered the first person to be honored as a saint who was not a martyr. While he was a catechumen and learning about the Catholic faith, he was also a member of the military. He was on guard duty on a cold and frigid winter night when a poor man, shivering and clothed only in rags, stood before him. Martin was moved with compassion. He whipped off his heavy cloak, drew his sword, cut the garment in two pieces and gave one to the beggar. That same night in a dream Martin saw Christ clothed in the part of the cloak he had given away. He is said to have heard Christ say, **“Martin has clothed me in this garment.”**

This story illustrates an essential part of our faith about Christ. As Catholics we believe that Christ is present in the word of Scripture and that he speaks to us when the word is proclaimed during our liturgy. We believe that Christ is present in the Eucharist and that on the altar we celebrate his death and resurrection. Equally and with the same conviction we must believe that Christ is present in people, that in serving others we are serving him, and that in ignoring others we are ignoring him. We must have a consistent faith in the reality of Christ in the word, in the Eucharist, and in people. Liturgy was never meant to be a private devotion, an individual relationship between God and one person. It is the expression of the Church

which is one body, one Spirit in Christ. That understanding of unity in Christ must motivate the way we live.

When we come across homeless, hungry people, we must recognize Christ in them. When we are aware of immigrants, documented or otherwise, we must acknowledge that it is Christ who is the foreigner. We must always welcome Christ and not turn him aside.

I have always believed that the most essential characteristic of a vibrant parish is that it is welcoming. The hospitality of the Church is not the hospitality of a four-star hotel where perfect manners are expected. In our Church, there should be room for everyone. Our parish church should be a place where all can come and renew their vision, revive their commitment to Christ, relight their baptismal candle, clean off their baptismal garment, and restore their baptismal dignity, reclaim their place at the Lord's Table and slowly remodel their lives. The Church is where we can all come home and be welcomed.