

It feels great to belong to this family of St John's Mitcham. I think people listen to my homily and take it seriously, and so should you. This week, when I went around visiting families nobody offered me scones and sponge cakes because, as mentioned in last week's homily, you do not want to fatten me up. Instead this week, I was offered chocolate brownies and banana cakes. I don't know why but I think that this must be a healthier option. What I realise is that I am much loved and you look after me well. This is a good feeling and thank you for making me welcome in your homes. I feel so privileged to be able to walk into your homes and welcomed with a smile. We can't hug but I can feel your love. As your parish priest I certainly enjoy the hospitality of you, my dear people. Thank you.

The modern day traveller has become accustomed to the easy availability of roadside cafes, service stations, motels, country inns, city hotels. In the days of Elisha, the prophet, there were no guest houses or fast-food stops. Those who travelled beyond the territory of their own family or tribe had to depend on the hospitality of strangers to survive. As we see from today's first reading, Elisha is lucky in his travels: he meets a woman who invites him to break his journey and eat at her house. The hospitality must have been good because Elisha makes a habit of stopping there on his travels.

The woman sees that Elisha is a holy man, and she asks her husband's permission to build an attic onto their house so that the prophet can have his own room when he stays with them. The husband must have agreed because the next we hear about Elisha is that he is resting in the upper room. The prophet wants to repay the hospitality of his hostess and he asks his servant for some ideas. His servant tells him: "Well, she has no son, and her husband is old." Her hope of a child is fulfilled. The new guest will be her child. And soon the attic of the prophet will become the nursery of the newborn.

The woman receives her reward. In the words of Jesus in today's Gospel: "Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward."

In the tradition of tribes who move from place to place to find new grazing lands for their cattle, hospitality becomes a matter of life and death. Their modern equivalent might be the migrant workers who leave home to find jobs in different areas and countries. All these people depend on welcome if they are to thrive. In the sacred tradition of Israel hospitality was regarded as one of the chief responsibilities of a caring people. The stranger, the outsider, the wayfarer, anyone outside home territory – all were regarded as people who needed special care. The reason for this was enshrined in the Law: "If a stranger lives with you in your land, You must count him as one of your own countrymen and love him as yourself – for you were once strangers yourselves in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34).

As soon as Jesus is born Matthew portrays him in the Gospel as the one who is born into a place where he is not accepted: he has no security and must be taken to Egypt for safety and shelter. At the beginning of his life Jesus is marked as the one who must depend on the hospitality of others. As an adult, Jesus learns that he cannot depend on the acceptance of his own family when he begins his ministry as a prophet. He takes to the road with his own band of supporters. As they leave their own region of Galilee behind them, they become a travelling people who have to depend on others' hospitality to receive them and welcome their message.

When Jesus is welcomed into towns and villages by people who see him as a holy messenger from God, the people receive a holy man's reward: the poor hear Good News, the sick are healed, sinners come to know the forgiveness of God. The people receive their own reward for *the hospitality of a faith that welcomes Jesus*.

Today, more than ever, we realise how dependent we are on others. We can't fool ourselves by saying that we are sufficient. We need others. We also have the ability to touch someone else's life. It is the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us that helps us to reaching out to strangers and showing them hospitality. And this is every Christian's responsibility. Receiving that goodness and hospitality of others with grace is also very important as this means that the giver is recognised and appreciated. No act of kindness, small or big, will ever go unrewarded. Jesus says that responding to those in need has its own reward. People won't lose by their generosity but rather gain more than they give. And above all, as Jesus tells us today: "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me." In the end, remember, it is God who is our guest.

We are truly blessed to have the love of our God in our hearts. Our faith itself is a reward from God. Can you imagine what our lives would be without our faith? It could be empty, hollow and unforgiving but we have faith and this is a gift from God. A God who helps us and guides through our journey of life. I know it's a lot to figure out and can be a bit daunting but if we believe and pray and ready to place our trust in God, He will guide us. 'The same everlasting Father who takes care of you today will take care of you tomorrow and everyday. Either He will shield you from suffering or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it'. Only have the courage to believe and our God will reward you with faith that sustains. Be at peace. God bless

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