

Hospitality

An often neglected, sometimes underestimated, Christian virtue is hospitality. Hospitality requires that we expose ourselves to others. As Christians, we must be willing to receive others, to welcome them into our lives.

Luke 10:38-42 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Reflections

Do you ever read the story of Mary and Martha only to feel sorry for Martha. I do. She welcomes Jesus and his disciples into her home, tries to make a meal and other preparations for them, is left to do all the work alone, and then doesn't get the support she's looking for from Jesus. Wasn't she offering the hospitality that Jesus had instructed his followers to provide? In Luke 10:25-29, just before visiting Martha and Mary, Jesus taught that part of the most important commandment is to *love your neighbor as yourself*. And then in Matthew 25:35, Jesus talked about the kind actions of righteous people: "*For I was hungry, and you fed me... I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.*" Isn't Jesus teaching us to act with kindness, compassion, and hospitality? Yes, but...

The Right Kind of Hospitality

Poor Martha only got it half right. She showed great hospitality by welcoming Jesus and his disciples into her home. But, then she left Jesus to focus on food and other aspects of her home. Maybe she was just trying to provide a proper meal and accommodations for her guests, but more worldly matters may have been nagging at her too. What would Jesus and the disciples think about her home? Would they be impressed by her meal? How would all of this reflect on her?

No matter her intentions, Martha's type of hospitality at that moment just didn't matter. Jesus was in her home! He was sharing his wisdom and teachings. Anything that wasn't already in place could wait, but being there in the moment could not. Mary, unwittingly or not, showed a different kind of hospitality. She made her guests feel welcome and valued by simply sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to what he had to say.

Be Welcoming

Someone once said that being *polite* is simply making the other person feel *at ease*. Similarly you could say that *hospitality* is simply making the other person feel *welcome*. One of the best ways to do that, whether you are in your home or not, is to share your time and attention with others; show them that you are concerned about who they are and what they have to say.

Unfortunately, being welcoming doesn't always come naturally. You have to take some chances and invite someone into your day, your life, your moment. Sometimes you have to consciously decide to help others feel welcome – but when you do, the rewards can be great! It allows for new connections, mutual support, and opportunities for the Holy Spirit!

Recently we were staying at my in-laws when they had a party for some friends. Everyone had a great time, but at one point I noticed two people much older than me quietly

sitting on either ends of a couch. I knew they would be fine, but I decided to sit down between them. Before I knew it, we realized that one of the people knew my great-uncle, a man I had never met. Back in WWII, my great-uncle had sat down next to this man just like I did. And now I was hearing amazing stories about what each did in WWII! Then our conversation turned to the current wars in the Middle East, and we were soon talking about events in that land in biblical times. Before I knew it again, we were having deep theological discussions about the divinity of Jesus. Amazing!

The Other Thing Mary Got

Mary got something else right too. The *other* part of the most important commandment is to *love the Lord with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind*. This is just what Mary was doing – and this is what Jesus would not take away from her. Her love for her Lord meant that she had to be there with her whole being; that was the one thing that mattered. Sometimes we need to set things aside so we can sit at Jesus' feet too.

So be intentional about being welcoming. Make sure you are offering the right kind of hospitality. Unexpected guests? Order pizza and sit down to talk. Someone you see who seems alone? Walk over and say hello; offer a kind word and a warm smile. Both of you will be glad you did.

Fern Nerhood

Readings

Don't have a Bible? Access these scriptures at biblegateway.com.

Sunday July 22

Luke 10:38-42 What do you worry about when you have guests coming over? How do you spend your time before and after they arrive? What does it mean to be welcoming to Jesus? What things do you need to set aside so you can sit at Jesus' feet?

Monday July 23

1 Peter 4:1-11 Peter has great advice for how to live in harmony with others. Why should we love? How should we offer hospitality? Is there one way to serve; is one way better than others? How should we speak to each other? What will God give us so we can serve each other and praise him? Consider which piece or pieces of Peter's message are speaking to you. What do you want to work on this week?

Tuesday July 24

Mark 9:33-37, Matthew 18:1-5 Children are very important to Jesus. We are to welcome them, pay attention to them, and care for them. Jesus even says we are to humble ourselves like children. What values or characteristics can we learn from children? What amazing thing does Jesus say will happen when we are welcoming to children? How is this possible?

Wednesday July 25

Matthew 25:34-40 Jesus wants us to show compassion, kindness, and hospitality to others – but not just to our friends, family, and people who are like us. Who are some people you tend to ignore or discount? How could your everyday actions make them feel more welcome and valued? What bigger actions could you try? What blessings might Jesus have in store for them and you?

Thursday July 26

Luke 9:1-6 Just like it's important how you offer hospitality, it's also important how you receive it. Why does Jesus want the disciples to stay in one home, and not go from place to place, as long as they are in a town? How do you receive hospitality?

Friday July 27

Acts 28: 11-15 On one of Paul's travels, some brothers literally went far out of their way to welcome Paul and his companions. What did this hospitality mean to Paul at that moment? How might it have affected his future activities and actions? How do you think it made the brothers feel? How do you feel when someone goes out of their way for you? How can we go out of our way for God?

Saturday July 28

1 Thessalonians 1:1-11 Paul praises the Thessalonians not just for welcoming him and his companions, but (in verse 6) for welcoming the *message* with joy from the Holy Spirit! What can we do to welcome Jesus into our hearts? How can we welcome God's Word with joy?

Let's Serve & Invite!

Check out this spot for simple ideas you can use at work and at play, on your own and with your family, to encourage others in the name of Jesus.

Offer hospitality in your own way

- What do you have to offer? Invite someone to your backyard pool; offer a ride to the airport or store; pet sit; share from your garden; or meet whatever need you see.
- Running an errand? Who else might have that same need?
- Dare to entertain spontaneously, without first cleaning your home! Welcome someone into your everyday lifestyle and give them the gift of being real.

Got a suggestion?
Email ServeandInvite@StJohnMD.org