



Sixteenth Sunday Ordinary Time - Year C

Genesis 18: 1-10 Colossians 1: 24-28 Luke 10: 38-42

There are many stories in the Scriptures about hospitality. Genesis is a wonderful collection of Jewish tribal stories. Today we hear of Abraham a great chieftain, bustling about on a hot afternoon, to organise a meal for three strangers who turn up out of the desert, and just when he was getting ready to sleep.

The story is full of energy as if hospitality requires urgency. Perhaps the energy is about attention, giving all your attention to the task in hand. Hospitality was a serious obligation as it could mean the difference between life and death.

In the story from Luke the pace is different. There is a contrast between calm and anxiety. This is a story that has provided many interpretations. Think about how you have understood it thus far.

Martha seems to be complaining that she is doing all the work and that Mary is just sitting around. Most women sympathise with Martha. Jesus defends the stance that Mary takes.

First of all Martha was not out in the kitchen as she is so often portrayed. Martha and Mary were quite well off. Their home was big enough to be able to entertain many so there would have been a domestic staff.

Like the story of the Good Samaritan where Jesus responds to the question of the lawyer here Jesus responds to the question of Martha. This is an important question about hospitality. What is the greater value: to attend to the needs of the guest or to attend to the guest?

At first glance we are tempted to say, "Aren't they the same?"

Put yourself into the picture. If you are a guest what would you prefer? To be made welcome and to have your host focus on you, engage you in conversation and make you feel that your presence is a grace **or** to sense that your arrival has thrown the house into chaos and that your presence has created more work for everybody?

This story was remembered by the early community because it taught an important message about how to be church.

If we are to make people welcome in our community it will be by being attentive to who they are and what they seek rather than giving them the impression that their presence is disrupting the well-ordered life of the parish.

Yes, we must find shelter for migrants and organise support systems but first of all they want to know that they are really welcome, that you care for them as brothers and sisters.

There are other people who seek hospitality; those whose marital situation has made them vulnerable or outside an interpretation of the law, those who are homosexual, those who are searching for a spiritual home - all of these people and many more need to be met by the loving attention of the *Marys* in our midst and only when they feel welcomed as family can we engage in helping them on a more practical level.

In the letter to the Colossians the writer tells us that he is willing to accept the pain of membership of the body of Christ because through this en-corporation (signified in our Baptism) we are pledged to bring everyone to fullness of life.

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