

OPEN HAND OPEN HEART OPEN MIND

When I reflect on the scripture today, the word openness comes to mind. Abraham was open to receive the heavenly visitors; Paul was open to the sufferings he endured for the sake of the Church; Martha opened her home to Jesus; Mary opened her heart to Jesus as she sat at His feet.

While each story is different, each one teaches us something about the way God wishes us to relate to one another and to Him. It may not surprise some of you that the person who is most responsible for teaching me about openness is our son Adam. If you have ever been at a restaurant when the Christy family leaves, you have probably seen Adam waving at everyone in the room and quietly saying “Hey You” as he bids them farewell. What a guy!

You see, our son Adam is a thief. He steals hearts. He stole the hearts of the intensive care nurses when he was born, and he has stolen the hearts of everyone who has cared for him since. He has a rap sheet a mile long.

If Hollywood would come to Ames to make a movie of his life, it would resemble the Christmas classic “It’s A Wonderful Life” with Jimmy Stewart, because his simple life has been such a positive influence on so many people, especially mom and dad.

Adam is twenty-eight now and he was born with an extra gene in his twenty-first chromosome, which made him a Down syndrome child. About one in every eight hundred babies has that extra gene. We did not see it at the time he was born, but hidden within that chromosome was a gift for all of us.

The number of people who have helped us care for Adam over the years must be in the hundreds by now. Many of his caregivers have been students who worked their way through college by providing care for people like Adam. They do not just put in their time; they share their lives and their love as well.

Like Abraham, they give their very best, not from duty alone, but from the heart. Many have graduated and moved on to other cities, many are still in the special education field.

We know that Adam has stolen their hearts, because they keep coming to visit him from miles away. They remember him on his birthday and at Christmas. He has even been a gift bearer and a ring bearer at several of their weddings. Adam has been an enormous influence on their lives. His ability to say with his eyes what he cannot express with his words is powerful. When I want to see the eyes of Jesus, I look into Adam's eyes, and I know that many of Adam's caregivers feel the same way. I can only imagine how many lives they will touch as they raise their families and become part of another community.

By being open to each other, both Adam and his caregivers receive a blessing. Their relationship transcends the roles of servant and recipient. They model the enthusiastic service that Abraham gave to the heavenly visitors. They become sharers in the divine plan to gather all into one body in Christ.

My point is this. As we serve one another, some give and some receive, but each one of us is blessed by the exchange. Blessing is a two way street. You cannot give a blessing without receiving a blessing in return. God multiplies that blessing and adds His divine power for the benefit of others. That is the way of Jesus. That is the way of the kingdom of God.

Adam loves to go to church. He especially likes the sign of peace when he gets to shake the hands of everyone close enough to reach him. Several times a parishioner has come up to us after Mass to comment on how Adam ministered to them today. That causes me to ponder how Jesus speaks to Adam, but I never doubt that He does. I am sure that like Mary in today's Gospel, Adam is sitting at the feet of Jesus.

As for mom and dad, Adam taught us what unconditional love is all about. That love did not come without a price. Our family suffered as Adam's fragile life hung in the balance for the first year of his life. He had a hole in his heart that needed to be repaired, but it took a full year for him to become strong enough to survive the surgery. In the meantime, we made many trips to the hospital to treat him for heart failure. He finally had heart surgery when he was one year old and weighed only twelve pounds. There was no choice. We could not wait any longer. The surgery was successful, and Adam no longer has a problem with his heart. In fact, I would say that the surgeon fixed three hearts that day.

Many of you parents can identify with that suffering for the sake of your children. You understand like Paul, that openness to suffering for the sake of your beloved is like rain upon the seeds of love causing that seed to grow into divine love.

Somehow, God gave Mary and me the strength to endure as a family. We have come to know that love always comes at a price. Jesus paid that price for us on the cross, Paul added his suffering for the sake of the Church, and all of us enter into that mystery when we endure our suffering for the sake of another. Through our suffering, our love becomes transfigured into divine glory.

I believe there is a reason that God sends visitors like Adam into our lives. When we open our hearts to them, and go out of our way to enter their world, these visitors can give us a foretaste of the love that God has prepared for all those who love him.

So what can learn today as we sit like Mary at the feet of Jesus, listening to His Word?

- Abraham was open to receive the heavenly visitors;
Will we be open to welcome all the visitors that God sends to us?

- Paul was open to the sufferings he endured for the sake of the Church;
Will we be open to suffering for the sake of another?
- Martha opened her home to Jesus;
Will we avoid the distractions of our busy life, and really listen to Jesus?
- Mary opened her heart to Jesus as she sat at His feet;
Will we see Jesus in the eyes of others, especially the disadvantaged?

As Adam so simply and beautifully demonstrates, we all have gifts to share with the world. Some have the gift to give and some have the gift to receive. All are gifts from God, and they are given to us for the benefit of others. As we receive the body and blood of Jesus, let us open our hearts to receive Him—Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. As we do, let us open our hearts to his children, wherever they may be. They may be just what the doctor ordered to mend a hole in our heart! That is the way of love. That is the way of Abraham, Paul, Martha, and Mary. That is the way of Jesus.

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July 18, 2010