

Recently I was visiting with a college-age young adult. When I inquired about her major she replied, “Hospitality Services.” Her career plan is to obtain a management position in a large hotel chain.

Today’s first reading and Gospel story place the virtue and practice of hospitality front and center. In both stories a meal figures prominently. In both it is God who comes as the stranger, the guest—in the first reading in the figures of the three messengers/angels depicted in the icon here in the sanctuary; in the Gospel through the humanity of Jesus. Today’s readings continue the theme of love of neighbor begun in last weekend’s parable of the Good Samaritan.

In his Rule for Monasteries, Chapter 53 “On the Reception of Guests”, Saint Benedict addresses the virtue and practice of hospitality. More than the observation of the conventions of social etiquette, important as these may be, Saint Benedict in his treatment on hospitality proclaims the nature of Jesus, the Eucharist, and our life as the Church.

For Benedict the guests who show up at the monastery or church door are, in fact, Jesus in his many guises, sacraments of his Real Presence, as real and valid as his Real Presence under the sacramental symbols of bread and wine in the Mass. “All guests shall be welcomed as Christ,” (RB 53:1; cf. Matt 25:35). Jesus is the neighbor, the one who is strange, different, other. We are not used to, nor comfortable with, letting the stranger in. We’ve all been conditioned, sadly due to the criminal actions of a few, to “stranger danger.” And, so, we avoid or keep others at a distance. I’m white, you’re black, or Asian, or Hispanic or whatever. I’m straight, you’re gay. We’re Christians, they’re Muslims. I’m male, you’re female. I’m clean, you’re in recovery.” And on it goes. We want, and do, hide behind our social lists; who’s acceptable and who’s not be it at the country club or even, sadly at times, in the church. Today’s Scriptures and St. Benedict’s admonition in his Rule challenge us to live St. Paul’s words of four weeks ago: “Through faith you are ALL children of God in Christ Jesus. ...There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free person, male or female, for all of you are ONE in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26,28,29).

Benedict goes on to say, our manner of hospitality, welcome, relationship to the “guest” is to be characterized by such traits and actions as “honor,” “courtesy,” “humility,” “adoration,” “every kindness,” “great care,” and “concern.” Our manner of welcoming *humanizes* people. Benedict tells us, “let every humanizing gesture be shown to the guest.” “Humanizing” is hard to translate into a single word. “Kindness” is its closest synonym. “Kindness” tells us what it means to act in a human way—to speak and act toward the recipient as if that one were Christ himself. In truth—***IT IS JESUS!***—**The Word made flesh and dwelling among us in the Sacraments of the Scriptures, the Altar, and each and every human person!**

Each of us is Christ the guest **and** Christ the host, the minister of hospitality! St. Paul reminds us today in the second reading, we are to steward/manage this divine gift of grace wisely and with love.

At home—how do I see my spouse, my children, my parents as Christ the guest? What words do I employ in my conversation with them? Do I ignore them by being self-absorbed or externally for example texting other people in their presence or even while eating with them at table or wearing ear buds tuned into some other form of entertainment rather than engaging in conversation with them?

As a parish—how do each of us welcome one another as we gather for Mass each week? Do I ever refuse the sign of peace to those next to or near me? Do I make the effort to make room in the pew to a guest; to introduce myself to a guest or a fellow parishioner I may not know sitting next to me? The author of the letter to the Hebrews reminds us: “Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels” (Hb 13:2).

In our guests, we have the opportunity to be Abraham and Sarah, Martha and Mary, Saint Benedict and his monks; to welcome Christ incarnate today. ***That’s*** a true major in ***HOSPITALITY SERVICES!***