

The Hospitality Gift



The first letter of Peter urges us "Be hospitable to one another without complaint." [see 1 Peter 4:8-11]

If you or I have been given the gift of hospitality - presuming that we will share it eagerly, joyfully - we have been given a treasure to share indeed.

What is this gift called hospitality, this gift that we are to offer, without complaining?

Several years ago I was visiting a couple of my "Florida" parishioners. The husband got to talking about all the visitors they had had that "winter". After a lengthy listing, which included me, he turned to me and said, "We often wonder what we've ever done to deserve all this. ..." I immediately thought about the imposition so many of us were making on this retired couple, but he continued, "We wonder what we ever did to deserve having so many wonderful people take time out of their busy lives and spend it with us." And I wondered how anyone could resist being with this couple who wrapped every visitor with care and appreciation and joy.

Genesis 18:1-8 tells us that Abraham invited the unexpected visitors to stop for rest and some nourishment. Then, off he hurried to Sarah. "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it and make cakes," were Abraham's instructions. Then off he dashed to the herd where he chose a calf, "tender and good" - which he gave to the servant to get ready!!

Hospitality ... watch Abraham and Sarah and the servant - listen to the language that describes their response to the unexpected visitors. Abraham said, "let me bring"; and then he "hastened to [and] ran to"; and when everything was prepared, Abraham "set it before them; [and] stood by them."

Hospitality ,, it's a simple, common gift; a gift that probably most of us have, to some degree; a gift so simple and ordinary that many of us overlook it. Yet, hospitality is a gift that when offered embraces and affirms the "guest". It is a precious gift that dispels the uncertainty, awkwardness and ill-ease of others. It is a gift that when given says to the other person, "You are holy and beloved, and I honour you.

And if a church family has an abundance of this gift called hospitality, it is an inviting, welcoming, warm and vibrant place; it will also be a community that will grow in spirit and in number and in blessings.

Of that story about Sarah and Abraham, the servant and the guests, it has often been said, "Beware. You may be entertaining angels, unawares." What would our Church be like if we saw one another, if we saw every other one as an angel, sent into our life by God, for us to receive and bless?

"Serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received ... so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ."