

Bite-Size Catholic Living III

Life Style: Being Hospitable

The New Testament *Letter to the Hebrews* concludes with advice and reminders. So we are encouraged, “Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels” [Hebrews 13:2]. The phrase, “unknowingly entertained angels” refers to the story in Genesis of Abraham and Sarah and their hospitality to three strangers traveling by who unknowingly to them were the presence of God. Saint Benedict in his “Rule” for monks on how to receive guests states, “All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me” [Matt 25:35]. To encounter and welcome a stranger is to welcome Christ. **To live a Christian life means to be hospitable to the stranger and anyone who comes to the door of our homes and lives.**

- Christian Feasts like Christmas and Easter and civic holidays like Thanksgiving and New Year’s Eve are particular times when people gather. Guests are often a part of those gatherings such as friends of our daughters and sons from college, a new fiancée, or invited friends from work. *Welcoming* can be another form of *clothing* a person with dignity and acceptance.
- Sometimes it is not the person themselves but their changed life situation which makes them a “stranger”. Consider a relative who has recently become widowed or released from incarceration. Or a person who is considered the “black sheep” of the family or with whom a major rift has been recently healed but still seems tentative.
- For the Passover Seder Jewish families set an extra seat at the head of the table and pour a cup of wine in case the Prophet Elijah arrives. Have you ever considered at major home gatherings setting an extra place just in case someone unexpected arrived? Christ?

Prayer

- Saint Benedict encourages us to pray with our guests. Consider praying for your guests before their arrival.

*God of journeys, whose presence travels with us daily,
bring our guests, known and unexpected, safely to our home this day.*

*May our conversations and shared stories make connections
that will form bounds of friendship.*

*We ask this through Jesus who encountered the stranger with humility and openness
and lives with your and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen*

Belief

- Read with your family the story of the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah and on a story from Jesus’ birth.

The biblical passages are found on the reverse side.

Abraham and Sarah's Visitors [Genesis chapter 8, verses 1-15]

The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oak of Mamre, as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot. Looking up, he saw three travelers standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and bowing to the ground he said: *"If it please you, do not go on past your servant. Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest under the tree. Now that you have come to your servant, let me bring you a little food, that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way."*

"Very well," they replied, *"do as you have said."*

Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, *"Quick, three measures of bran flour! Knead it and make bread."* He ran to the herd, picked out a tender, choice calf, and gave it to a servant, who quickly prepared it. Then he got some curds and milk, as well as the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them, waiting on them under the tree while they ate.

"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. *"There in the tent,"* he replied. One of them said, *"I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son."*

Reflection Questions: Have you ever experienced an unexpected or uninvited guests? What was it like? How did you respond? Have strangers brought good news into your life as these travelers did for Sarah?

The Birth of Jesus [Luke chapter 2, verses 1- 7]

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

A Reflection Question: There is nothing worse than experiencing a cold and unwelcoming reception. Do you remember a time when you were made to feel unwelcome? What was it like?