

# CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, July 21, 2019

## A Hospitality Of Presence

*Written by Rev. Mark Suslenko*

**Genesis 18:1-10a**

**Colossians 1:24-28**

**Luke 10:38-42**



Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, "Speak tenderly to them. Let there be kindness in your face, in your eyes, in your smile, in the warmth of your greeting. Always have a cheerful smile. Don't give your care, but give your heart as well." Living the Gospel is not simply about providing a service to people in need but about a quality of being. Hospitality is not just about opening our doors but opening our very souls.

All too often we fall into the trap of thinking that our mission as Christians is convincing people that they need to adopt our agenda. We welcome them to a point but then when they do not completely fit with the specs of our program, the wall goes up. Rather, the mission of the Gospel, which is a mission of hospitality, is about welcoming others where they are and with their particular needs and desires; it is more about listening than it is about doing.

The Gospel this weekend portrays Martha and Mary, the doer and the listener. Practical sense tells us that both are necessary. Yet, we struggle with both in our lives. We can identify with Mary but we are really more attracted to Martha. Martha's the objective one, her script is specified. She can make the grocery list, plan the day, mix the ingredients, set the table, and do all of the stuff that is required of a perfect hospitable host. Mary is the subjective one whose script is not specified. She is the one who is comfortable with spontaneity. She brings a quality of presence to a situation rather than making sure that the china is free of cracks. Having not really encountered Jesus before, she needs to be ready to think on her feet, set her agenda aside, and desire a relationship. Mary is the one who takes the art of hospitality to the Gospel level by truly welcoming and not only serving.

The first reading from Genesis underscores this same theme. Abraham's hospitality to three strangers demonstrates the need to open oneself to the stranger, to hear what he or she has to say. The better part of hospitality is being attentive to the guest, to what he has to say, what he has to offer, and what he truly needs. This is the core of biblical righteousness and justice.

When a person is open to another and is disposed to authentic listening, he or she can begin to understand what our psalmist exhorts: "One who walks blamelessly and does justice; who thinks the truth in his heart and slanders not with his tongue. He who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord." Jesus went into people's homes, sat down, and listened. He didn't go in with an agenda, insist that they comply with a particular set of teachings in order to enter the kingdom of God, or chide them for living a life unworthy of God's calling. Jesus just sat there. By a quality of presence, miracles happened ... lives changed.

There is something very attractive about rules, rituals, and proper prayers. In the journey of coming to know and develop a relationship with God, they are necessary and serve a vital purpose. Martha serves a vital purpose. Beyond task orientation, however, lies the depth of contemplation. This happens at that point in our relationship with God when we begin to move beyond that which is required and tangible and learn how to see, hear, listen, and connect differently. Contemplation happens when we begin to change and our souls are engaged in dialogue with all of creation and all of God's children.

Richard Rohr, OFM, tells us that "contemplative prayer is the change that changes everything. It's not telling you *what* to see, but teaching you *how* to see ... The gift of contemplation will be experienced as freedom, abundance, love, spaciousness, and grace. This entire experience of gratuity makes you fall in love with God." This is what happened with Mary, she fell in love with Jesus!

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta fell in love with Jesus and was then able to fall in love with all of those individuals who needed her care. The relationship she had with Jesus changed her inwardly and made her a temple of hospitality in a most authentic way. She was able to place herself at the feet of the people she served and truly minister to their needs and desires. And we can do the same if we risk allowing the Spirit to move us out of our comfort zones to a different, less predictable place.

As we learn how to listen and begin allowing God to change how we see and understand, it may seem at first that we are wasting time. Over time, however, our relationships will change dramatically, and we will realize that we, too, have chosen the better part.

*Rev. Mark Suslenko*

## PRAYER

St. Michael the Archangel,  
defend us in battle.  
Be our protection  
against the wickedness and snares of the devil.  
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,  
and do thou,  
O Prince of the heavenly hosts,  
by the divine power of God,  
cast into hell Satan,  
and all the evil spirits,  
who wander through the world  
seeking the ruin of souls.  
Amen.

— *Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel*