

Bible Study

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle C

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Good and gracious God, we place ourselves in the awareness of your presence and ask you to send your Holy Spirit to guide us through this time of reflection and prayer. May we come to know you more fully and be more faithful disciples. We ask this through Jesus, our Lord. Amen.”

Focusing Questions

1. Can you recall a time when you remember receiving hospitality so striking that you still recall it today?
2. How do you like to show hospitality when someone comes to your home?

Commentary before the First Reading: Genesis 18:1-10a

Have you noticed that we have been reading from a different book of the Old Testament every week during Ordinary Time? The Church tried to choose First Readings with a thematic connection to the Gospel reading, which is more or less a serial reading during these months. One of this week’s themes is hospitality. Abraham’s hospitality to his divine visitors may sound excessive to us, but the code of hospitality in the East at that time was far more demanding than it is in our newer civilization. At that time hospitality to a traveler could be the difference between life and death. By the way, a terebinth is a type of tree, large and grand, like an old, majestic oak tree. To have or to find a terebinth was considered a sign of God’s blessing.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Point out 3 separate gestures of hospitality that Abraham offered to the 3 strangers.
2. God appeared to Abraham as 3 young men; what does that seem to suggest or hint to us as Christians?
3. And Abraham addressed them as, “Sir.” Did Abraham know that his visitors were the Lord?
4. What happened between verse 4 and verse 5?
5. Read a little farther. What was Sarah’s reaction to the announcement that she would have a son within a year? Why did she react that way?
6. What was the name of the son to whom Sarah would give birth?
7. If this story were an Aesop’s Fable, what would be the moral of the story?

Commentary before the Second Reading: Colossians 1:24-28

This reading continues from where we left off last week. The first verse here does not imply that Jesus’ passion and death were somehow defective or incomplete. Rather, Saint Paul is developing the concept that the Church is the Body of Christ and, just as Jesus suffered physically, to be a disciple entails some degree of suffering. In that sense, Jesus’ passion was not the end to suffering; there was more to come. Every disciple must take up his or her cross daily and join his or her sufferings to those of Jesus.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. God the Son came to reveal to humankind a mystery, which was also Good News. What was that mystery?
2. How is it possible to rejoice in one’s sufferings, as Saint Paul says he does?
3. Is it possible, in your opinion, to be a good Christian without suffering? Explain your answer.
4. In what sense might it be a type of hospitality to be aware that Christ lives in us, even during difficult times?
5. What might that have to do with becoming “perfect [or “mature”] in Christ”?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Luke 10:38-42

The story in today’s Gospel reading follows immediately after last week’s story of the Good Samaritan. The siblings Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were close friends of Jesus, according to Saint John. They lived in Bethany, about 3 miles from Jerusalem. There is a theme of hospitality in this reading too, but there is much more!

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. What is your favorite line from this charming story?
2. What was unusual about Mary’s choice of activity in this reading, at least in her time and culture?
3. How did Mary respond to her sister’s complaints about having to do all the work of hospitality?
4. Restate the meaning of Jesus’ words to Martha in your own words.
5. So then, what is the “much more” that involves another kind of hospitality?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. Which of the sisters in the Gospel story is more like you? Say more.
2. Can you think of a possible situation in which you could get so caught up in the serving that you miss the whole point of having a guest?
3. Do you sometimes find it difficult to see the reality of God's presence in those whom you are helping? Does hospitality ever feel like a burden, a cross?
4. How much time in an average day do you estimate that you spend offering hospitality to Jesus – in reading or listening to God's word and reflecting on it, just being aware of Jesus' presence within you?
5. What value is there in our time of having communities of consecrated religious like the Poor Clares or the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, who spend several hours every day in prayer and adoration?
6. What changes, if any, would you like to make in the balance between prayer and activity in your life, in order to give better hospitality to God?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, our world is so busy and worried about so many things. Gently lead us to that depth where you are the center of our lives, where we see your presence in other people, where your word provides the foundation for all that we do and moves us to do it for the good of others, where our heart is at peace. We lift up this prayer in your name to the Father and the Holy Spirit, with whom you live and reign as one God forever and ever. Amen. (Sign of the Cross)