

Homily for the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 27-28, 2020

Readings: 2 Kings 4: 8-11, 14-16A; Romans 6: 3-4, 8-11; Matthew 10: 37-42

Preacher: Kathi Piehler

When I was growing up in the 1950s my family had a Sunday ritual—we would all go to Mass together, come home and my mother would cook an extra special breakfast. Then my mom would vacuum and dust the living room and dining room, even though they really didn't need it. And why did she do this while still in her special "Go to Church" dress? Because it was Sunday afternoon and *someone* might stop by! And, of course, she always had some refreshments on hand to offer these unexpected guests. It was just the hospitable thing to do.

I must say though, we were not quite as hospitable as the woman in today's Old Testament reading who not only asked Elisha to dine with them but asked her husband to build a guest room on the roof of their home so Elisha, a holy man of God, could stay with them when he was traveling through their town. Now *that's* hospitality!

Fast forward to 2020. Not only would we not dream of "stopping by" someone's home uninvited, but if there is a knock on our door, and if it's not an Amazon delivery, we simply don't answer the door until we check our Ring Video Doorbell—no unexpected guests, please.

It seems that the concept of hospitality has taken quite a hit today. And that was even before Covid-19 came into our everyday vocabulary and by necessity we are isolated and practicing "social distancing."

The gospel today is simply about Christian hospitality: Jesus said to His apostles, "Whoever receives you receives *me*." Jesus is assuring us that when we welcome others—be it family, friends or strangers—He is surely there also. What a profound privilege as well as an awesome responsibility! Jesus is telling us that He is truly present each time we offer Christian hospitality.

Consider Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*: "The bearers of Jesus' word receive a final word of promise for their work. They are now Christ's fellow workers, and will be like him in all things. Thus, they are to meet those to whom they are sent as if they were Christ himself. When they are welcomed into a house, Christ enters with them. They are bearers of his presence. They bring with them the most precious gift in the world, the gift of Jesus Christ. And with them they bring God the Father, and that means indeed forgiveness and salvation, life and blessing. That is the reward of their toil and suffering. Every service people give them is service provided to Christ himself."

Wow! How does all this translate to you and me, especially in the challenging times in which we live? Where are the opportunities for Christian hospitality for us?

As we continue quarantine and isolation, that hospitality might be right in our own homes. Parents are using this “enforced family time” to take on a whole new perspective of what they really want their nuclear family to look like, to act like. Covid-19 has given us the opportunity to get off the merry-go-round of endless activities that prevents family meals and meaningful conversations. Now we have the time to quietly read with our children instead of practically living in our SUVs as we run from place to place morning till night.

And, not to be simplistic, but in these sad times of racial division and strife can we look to Christian hospitality to build bridges? A perfect example is Rahul Dubey of Washington, D.C., who on June 1st opened his home to over 50 protesters to spend the night. They were inadvertently caught in his neighborhood after the 7 p.m. curfew. This reminds me of the hospitality of the woman in today’s Old Testament reading.

The Gospel tells us that “Whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink....” I believe this passage is reminding us to start with some easy bits of hospitality—those sips of cold water, because we all are not called to be Rahul Dubey. For each of us it will be played out in a different arena. I know a white woman who has several friends who are in bi-racial marriages and she simply emailed them, asking how they are doing. That was a much appreciated, refreshing drink for them. Or a Facebook Group that was formed in Virginia to bring neighbors of all colors together. Their motto at the top of the FB page is from Max Lucado, “No one can do everything but everyone can do something”—again, that small drink of cold water.

Yes, today’s concept of hospitality takes on a very different look than my home life of 50 or 60 years ago. But it is no less real or genuine. It is no less powerful.