

Dear Parishioners,

When someone lives alone, it is often challenging for that individual to have guests in for dinner. The host needs to be busy about getting the drinks and hors d'oeuvres, finishing up the dinner, etc. At the same time, the host wants to be with his or her guests. This raises an important question: how can one serve and be hospitable at the same time one is attentive to guests? This can sometimes be a tricky balancing act. But every good host knows that the guests are more important than anything else.

This weekend's Gospel demonstrates many expressions of hospitality: welcoming, listening, and serving. While each expression is valuable, none is complete in itself nor an end in itself. There is no one way to be hospitable. Hospitality in its deepest meaning makes possible a personal encounter of the kind that Mary is having with Jesus. This is the "better part" to which Jesus refers. Martha's generous hospitality is marred by her upbraiding Jesus and complaining to Him about Mary. Rather than being truly hospitable, she is "anxious and worried" only about accomplishing a task. Her welcome shifts away from Jesus to herself. Busy about herself, she misses the "better part" ... centering on Jesus. The "better part" is to be undividedly present to the person of Jesus. Even when serving.

Hospitality – genuine welcome of the other and surrender to the other – facilitates encounter. One critical aspect of discipleship is being attentive to Jesus' presence. Abraham (in this weekend's First Reading) is totally attentive to the three strangers. He greets them and bows down in respect. He extends an invitation to remain a while and then does what he needs to do to make his guests comfortable. Abraham's hospitality was an attentiveness to his guests. In contrast, Martha is "anxious and worried." She loses sight of her Guest and gets wrapped up in her task, as well-meaning as that may be.

The Gospel teaches us about encountering the Lord. Martha surrendered to anxiety and worry rather than to the presence of her Guest. What is the "better part"? As important as certain aspects of hospitality are, the "better part" is to surrender to the presence of the Lord. Faithful discipleship depends upon keeping the Lord at the center of all we are and all that we do. Faithful discipleship depends upon encountering the Lord.

So, how do we keep Jesus at the center of our lives when we are always so busy? One way is to practice seeing Jesus in every person we meet. Another way is to remember that all the good we have and do ultimately comes from God who is the source of all good. Yet another way is to stop and think about why we are doing things. Are we doing things simply to accomplish a task or are we doing things to build a stronger relationship with others?

In the "busy-ness" of the average person's everyday life, we must take time to be present to others so that we truly *encounter* them. This is primary if we disciples are not to lose sight of the One who teaches us – and often teaches us through those to whom we are truly hospitable. Discipleship relativizes our noble and pious instincts to be busy about others and calls us to become present and take the other into our heart. It necessarily requires our surrender to the One who speaks, and that surrender looks like self-giving. The encounter with Jesus is essential for Christian hospitality. Let us hear that well!

May Saint Michael the Archangel defend, guide, protect, and intercede for us always!

Fr. Larry