

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time/48th Anniversary of our Diocese

July 21, 2019 11:30 a.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

Most human beings in just about every culture are raised to practice what we call “common courtesy” with one another. In polite company, we say “please” and “thank you”; we might pause to let someone go ahead of us thru the door or down the aisle; we might offer an older person our seat in a crowded room, or perhaps share a drink of water on a hot day like today. Hospitality, extending a warm welcome to others, is a basic part of that “common courtesy” that has been practiced since the beginning of time. Today’s Readings focus on “hospitality” as more than an act of courtesy, but really as a consequence of being a person of faith.

We heard a dramatic example of hospitality in our first Reading which took place in the days of Abraham, some 4,000 years ago. The practice then, in the nomadic culture of the Middle East, way before there were “Hampton Inn’s” strategically positioned along common traveling routes, or (if you can imagine it) even before “McDonalds”, people who were traveling long distances had to rely on the kindness and hospitality of strangers for their very survival. And so in today’s Reading from Genesis, Abraham, who would eventually become the “Father of Faith”, trying to cool off on a very hot day (like today) by sitting at the entrance to his tent, notices 3 strangers just standing there.

Keeping in mind that Abraham was already a very old man, in his late 80’s, the Reading tells us that there was a kind of urgency about everything that Abraham did: “*he ran to greet them*”, and then begged them to allow him to give them something to eat and a place to rest on their journey. He then “*hastened*” to get Sarah working on a meal; “*he ran*” to his herd to pick out, not just any, but the “*choice steer*”, and then “*quickly*” had the meal prepared.

As it turned out, those “three strangers” were “messengers from God” (that is, Angels), who revealed to Abraham that by that same time the following year, he and his very aged wife Sarah would give birth to a son, and in doing so, God’s Promise to Abraham is fulfilled. So, even though that was not why Abraham did what he did, the hospitality he showed to those “messengers of God” came back to him, as they say, “a hundredfold”.

Our Gospel gives us another example of hospitality. Today’s passage follows immediately from last Sunday’s Gospel---remember, it was the Parable of the Good Samaritan. On His way to Jerusalem, Jesus passes right thru the town of Bethany where his dearest friends, Martha and Mary, lived. Their brother, Jesus’ dear friend Lazarus had just recently died. And so Jesus stops to pay a visit along the way.

We’re all familiar with this story: how Martha ran around in a frenzy, throwing together a meal for Jesus, while Mary just sat quietly at Jesus’ feet to visit with Him.

There are those who try to use this Gospel passage, and Martha and Mary in particular, as examples of two different kinds of spirituality. In that case, Martha is pointed to as one who is busy about acts of charity and good deeds of service to others; while Mary is pointed to as the example of the contemplative life---a life of prayer and reflection. If there is any merit to that kind of distinction, the “*Marthas*” would be known as the “*Do-ers*”; the “*Marys*” would be known as the “*Pray-ers*”, or the “*Be-ers*”.

When Martha complains to Jesus that He should tell Mary to get up and do something, namely: to help her, Jesus, instead, tries to calm her by saying: “*Martha, Martha, you are*

anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken from her." In other words, Jesus is validating both approaches to spirituality, and in fact, is saying that we need both. We must be "do-ers" of good deeds, acts of charity, and works of mercy. But before we can "do", we have to make sure that we are rooted in a deep, and personal, Love for Jesus, which can only happen thru Prayer---by spending time listening to Jesus---by "be-ing" with Jesus. Our Love for Christ, which is deepened through our prayer life, leads us---or rather drives us---to a life of Christ-like service.

As I mentioned at the beginning of our Mass, today is a special day for our Diocese. It was 48 years ago today that then Pope (now Saint) Paul VI established our Diocese, forming it from the Diocese of Grand Rapids to our North and the Diocese of Lansing to our East. The 9 counties of southwest Michigan became our own Diocese, under the leadership of our first Bishop, Bishop Paul Donovan, on this day in 1971.

Every Diocese is a Local Church where Catholics, united with their Bishop, live out our Faith and continue the Mission of the Church which Jesus gave to the first Apostles, and which has been handed down for generations since.

Pope Francis has described the Church gathered together in a Diocese in this way: *"It is the presence of the Church in a given territory..... It is a community of parishes, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey."* (Evangelii Gaudium, # 28)

That's what our Diocese has been called to be throughout these 48 years, and as we celebrate this anniversary, I hope we---our lay faithful, religious, deacons, priests and me---in all 59 of our parishes and 26 Collaboratives---will continue to advance the mission of Jesus and to be *"a community of parishes---and a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey"*. In other words, we need to make sure that one of our characteristics as a Diocese, and as Catholics, will be that of faith-based hospitality, in the example of Abraham, in the example of Martha and Mary, and most of all in the example of Jesus, Who gives Himself completely to us---Body and Blood---to be our Food and Drink in the Holy Eucharist we are celebrating.

Our world is changing in many ways. It's sad to see that as a society, and perhaps our culture as a whole, we are becoming less welcoming of the stranger, more fearful of people who are different than we are, hesitant to offer a hand up to those down and out, and more ready to build barriers than to open doors, or our hearts, to those in need.

Regardless of the toxic political climate of our time, as followers of Jesus---as people of Faith---we must rise above that climate and always see people as Jesus sees them---as sisters and brothers in Christ. We must be both "Do-ers" and "Be-ers", a combination of Martha and Mary, so that we never ignore the stranger among us, for as Scripture itself reminds us, *"Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels."* (Heb. 13:2)

May our Diocese of Kalamazoo be blessed for years to come, and may we be a *"community of parishes---a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey"*. Because, my dear sisters and brothers in Christ, we are all on the same journey, and our collective destination is to spend eternity with God in Heaven. Let us do all that we can, every day, to reach out in loving service to help one another, friends AND strangers, all along the way.

May God bless you, now and always!