

Father O'Connor's Homily for 20 July 2025  
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time-C

Genesis 18: 1-10a  
Colossians 1: 24-28  
Luke 10: 38-42

Hospitality is a warm and welcoming virtue. Hospitality comes from the Latin word, “hospes,” which means both “a host” and “a guest.” Hospitality has to do with “the relationship between a host and a guest.” The virtue of hospitality teaches us how to welcome other people when we are the host and the hostess, and how to accept the welcome of others when we are the guest.

Hospitality is the first of the four pillars of stewardship as a way of life. The other three are: prayer, formation and service. Hospitality is the first pillar because if we don't make other people feel welcome, there won't be anyone around to pray with, or to offer formation to, or to serve.

There are two rules for guests that I learned a long time ago. The first is: “To be a good guest, show up on time.” Don't arrive too early, and don't be late, but show up on time. The second rule is: “Have the good sense to know when to go home.”

There are some other rules that sound a bit harsh, but make a solid point: “On the first day you're a guest. On the second day you're a burden. And on the third day you're a pest.” I suppose this is another way of saying, “Don't wear out your welcome.”

The Irish have a set of verses about welcoming guests that may be a bit “over the top”: “Come in the evening, come in the morning. Come when expected, come without warning. Thousands of welcomes you'll find here before you. And the oftener you come, the more we'll adore you!”

Well, even though a bit over-stated, it does tell us about an attitude of warm hospitality. And we find hospitality as a theme in all three of the Scripture passages today: “the relationship between a host and a guest.”

In the first reading, from the Book of Genesis, Abraham and his wife Sarah are visited by three messengers of God. Abraham and Sarah welcome them. Sarah bakes her famous rolls and Abraham has a steer slaughtered for a special company-class roast beef dinner.

After dinner, one of the guests says to Abraham, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son” – whose name will be Isaac. What warm hospitality and welcome we find here!

In the second reading from Saint Paul’s letter to the Colossians, he teaches us why we are to be hospitable people. “It is Christ in you,” Paul says. Christ lives in us and in our neighbor. When we welcome a neighbor we are welcoming Christ.

In the Gospel we see “welcoming Christ” in action. Jesus visits the home of Martha and her sister, Mary. Martha welcomes Him at the door and prepares dinner. Mary meanwhile sits at His feet listening to His every word.

Martha gets upset. She had cleaned the house, set the table, arranged the centerpiece, and now she is doing the last-minute finishings on her “candlelight supper.”

So Martha walks into the living room and looks down her nose at Mary at the feet of Jesus. You can picture Martha with her hands on her hips and with an irritated tone saying, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me!”

Jesus answers her, “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.”

Now what is this all about? What is Jesus teaching us about hospitality?

Well, Martha represents the hospitality of service. Mary represents the hospitality of listening. And both are important. But the truth of the matter is that many of us are better at the Martha-part of service than we are at the Mary-part of listening.

May I offer you three practical ideas for being a good listener?

The first one is: give your full attention to the person who is talking to you.

There was a public figure who, as he was shaking hands with the person in front of him, would be looking over that person’s shoulder to see who was next in line.

Now how would that make you feel? Perhaps we even do this without realizing it. Rather than giving our full attention to the person in front of us, we can be mentally off to what is coming up next.

The second idea is: make full eye contact with the one who is speaking to you.

A lot of people today are wedded – even addicted – to their phones. With their eyes constantly checking the screen, the person in front of them knows that they are taking second place to that device for attention. Our eye contact says to the other person, “Yes, I’m listening. I am with you.”

And the third idea is: know the difference between FYI and NYB. Know the difference between “For Your Information” and “None of Your Business.”

Sometimes conversations start very well, but then there is that probing question that makes the other person feel uneasy.

For instance, somebody visits you and says, “My, your home is absolutely beautiful!” Then they ask, “And how much did you pay for it?” And the good feeling slips away!

Or someone says, “That outfit really looks smart on you!” Then they ask, “And what size are we wearing these days?” There it goes....

To give our full attention to the person who is talking to us, to show this with our eye contact, and to be careful to know the difference between “For Your Information” and “None of Your Business” – are all contributors to the hospitality of good listening.

We see the hospitality of service in Martha, which is important, and the hospitality of listening in Mary, which is at least as important – and probably even more challenging.

This hospitality of listening is also important in our relationship with Our Lord in our prayer: to give Him our full attention as Mary did, seated at His feet and listening to His every word.

And so perhaps that poem that the Irish have given us is not so “over the top” at all when we say it to Jesus: “Jesus, come in the evening, come in the morning. Jesus, come when expected, come without warning. Thousands of welcomes you’ll find here before you. And the oftener you come, Lord, the more we’ll adore you. Amen.”