

## 071810 SEASHORE HOSPITALITY

(Ah, the memories—and a few scars too!)

I went down to the seashore for the day Friday. I left after the 6:30 Mass, got down a little after 9 AM and was back in the Rectory by 8:30 or so that night. I knew that my niece was going to be down with her three daughters. I didn't realize that she had also invited a family of five to join them—a mom and dad and three more girls. And then around lunch time my nephew's wife and her two boys arrived and she had invited a couple and their two boys also. Shortly thereafter my brother and his wife arrived. Ten adults and ten children ages 21/2 to 12. Twenty people. Some were family; some were not. Eating took place in shifts with some delicate coordinating. There was a spirit of hospitality but not everyone knew who was coming down. I sure didn't. Such moments call for patience and understanding and help. All of that was present. When everyone went to the beach in the morning I took a nap on the couch. After lunch when the groups headed for the bay and the beach I switched my nap taking to the front porch swing. When everyone returned to the roost, my brother and his wife and I headed for dinner. It was great.

For many years my mom ran the seashore house. When I say ran I mean she Ran the seashore house complete with full dinners and sit down meals with hors d'oeuvres beforehand. However, you left the beach by 4PM. Everyone showered, most outside. NO sand inside. NO wet bathing suits or towels inside. Everything hung up on the clothesline—and neatly too. At five thirty everyone sat down for a full meal. No exceptions. When my mom was younger she was harried like Martha was in the gospel. After that she learned that she didn't like being harried and so she learned lethal. Eventually though she stopped going to the beach with everyone else, stayed home to work at her own pace and even get some quiet time on the front porch. When we returned from the beach she would sit with us on the front porch and know that the food was all ready. She could relax and enjoy the company and hear the retelling of the afternoon's happenings. She made a sacrifice not to go to the beach in order to have more order and more enjoyable hospitality later in the day. Trade-offs, perhaps. But that sacrifice is something she suffered, as Saint Paul would say, for the greater good. And it worked for many years. That one sacrifice actually enabled her to become much more hospitable.

The Old Testament reading from Genesis speaks of the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah to three men whom they do not know and who are never actually identified in the story. The reader begins to sense they are from God by what they say but it isn't fully clear. The result of the hospitality offered by Abraham and Sarah is that the men make a prophecy, a promise to return and an assurance of a son by this time next year. A son was what this couple had longed for for many years. Here now was a promise made. Their hospitality yields hope for them and new life for them. Not bad.

In Luke's story of Martha and Mary, Martha has gone over the edge. She has lost it, we would say today. She has allowed the demands of dinner get to her. How old do you think Martha is in this story? Do you see her as fifty or closer to thirty? She and her sister Mary and Lazarus are longtime friends of Jesus. He has been in their home many times before. But you can tell that Martha has lost it by what she says. Listen: "Lord, do you

not care....?” Not care? Is she actually asking Jesus if he doesn’t care? If there is one thing she knows about Jesus, it is that he is all about caring. Martha has become too busy. That happens in life. It surely happens to me and I know it happens to you at times. When it happens the same dynamic is at work. I begin to resent and then I begin to blame. That is what Martha is doing. She knows that Jesus isn’t worried about whether he is going to get fed or not, or fed on time or not. That is the last thing on his mind. She has put this pressure on herself. Because we have been in her shoes we have great empathy for her and actually tend to give her a free pass because we all know the Mary’s in our lives.

But wait. Isn’t Mary actually being hospitable too? Isn’t she spending time with him? Isn’t she being present to him? Isn’t she listening to him? Aren’t all these things a great deal of what hospitality is truly all about? Isn’t listening—in any situation—at the heart of hospitality? I pray every day for the grace of a listening heart so that when I am with you I can truly hear what you are saying and what you mean. I pray so that when I am with family and friends I can truly listen to them. I must say that I find I fail much more than I succeed in this. I listen with my motor running; impatient for you to finish what you are saying so I can wow you with what I want to say. I grow defensive at times. “Whaddya mean by that?” I snap. I am very familiar with what resentment feels like and how pointing the blame feeds my heart. But none of that works. None of that helps. None of that is successful. But still I strive to be more effective as a listener.

But when you speak of our relationship with the Lord where does hospitality come in there? We can’t fix dinner for him anymore. We can’t let him sit on the front porch swing with a cool glass of iced tea. Actually the only real hospitality that we can show to the Lord is the very same kind of hospitality that Mary showed him—listening. I mean active listening, attentive listening, especially here at Mass. It needs our attention. We have to work at that, work at ignoring all the distractions that come. I do. You must too. We must work at listening to the prayers and seconding them in our own hearts. We have to listen better to the readings, perhaps preparing ourselves before hand so that we know what is coming. We have to enter into the responses and sing the music. Even if you cannot sing outwardly you can sing within your own heart. Everyone can. Listen to the homily. But most of all, at the consecration of the Mass, listen to the words of Jesus himself. They are meant for you, for you to hear. Drink them in. Hear them as if he is saying them directly to you, only to you. Open your innermost self to him in that moment. Hold nothing of yourself back from him. Accept what he says. Be grateful. Be appreciative. Be receptive to the grace of that moment.

Tell him how much you love him and want to live for him, and to do his will. Ask him to help you learn his ways. You will begin to feel his presence if you do this regularly. You will “hear” him speak to you at a very deep level in your own soul. That is what Mary was doing. That is what she had to learn how to do. So did Martha. So did my mom. So did I. So must we all. That is how we offer our own genuine hospitality to the God who loves us.