

A Reflection on Hospitality at St. Joseph's-Fr. Jim

Hospitality is prevalent in the scriptures whether it is Abraham graciously receiving the three strangers at Mamre (Gen. 18:1-15) or the widow of Zarepath offering food and shelter to Elijah (I Kings 17:9-24) or the travelers to Emmaus inviting the stranger to stay with them, who makes himself known as their Risen Lord (Luke 24:13-35). Jesus regularly receives hospitality (Luke 10:38-40; Luke 19:5-10; Matt 19:10-13) and teaches his disciples the importance of hospitality (Luke 7:44-47; Luke 16:19-31; Luke 9:12-13; Matt 10:4-12; Matt 18:5; Luke 14:12-14; Matt 25:35-40). In the scripture reading of Martha and Mary, Jesus also teaches the true way hospitality is to be shown. St. Paul exhorts us: *“Be generous in your hospitality”* (Romans 12:13) and the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews states: *“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for thereby some have entertained angels unaware”* (Heb.13:2)

This attitude of our faith is in contrast to a world where there is so much fear, anxiety, self-centeredness, rivalry, hurriedness, competition, and craving for power. As Fr. Henri Nouwen has stated, hospitality is our desire to create a space where the stranger can become a friend. It is not an attempt to coerce or manipulate people but to create a place where change and enrichment can take place. When we become “partners” with strangers by welcoming them, it will illumine, deepen and enlarge our own world. If Christians can't offer hospitality to each other, where on earth will we find it?

It has often been mentioned that one of the wonderful characteristics of St. Joseph's is their sense of hospitality. Parishioners have stated that they chose this parish because of how they felt welcomed by this faith community. I too have definitely felt this in my time here.

It is important to keep in mind that there will be a chance these next weekends for our parish to “showcase” our spirit of hospitality to others, as the new Mass schedule begins for the cluster. You will see newcomers or visitors come to our Masses the next few weekends, and we will have new opportunities to find ways to help people feel welcome at St. Joseph's.

There are little things that we can do sometimes that make a big difference to others. **First, we might park farther away from the church than we normally do (unless you have mobility problems), to allow the new participants at our 5:30pm and 10:30am Masses to have an easier time coming into the church, especially for those who will be coming for their first time to St. Joseph's. Second, we could introduce ourselves to the person in our pew (or in front of us or behind us), so that we can make the sign of peace more personal. Third, you can move in towards the middle of the pew, so that those that come later can fit more easily into the seat. Fourth, you can stay after for the coffee hours after Mass the next couple of weekends to meet members of our parishes that are attending different Masses now.**

When we have parish gatherings (such as our Adult Education Speakers Presentations or one of our dinners), this is another opportunity to “welcome Jesus in the stranger.” (Matthew 25:35) Finally, have you ever tried inviting a family member or neighbor (who is not Catholic or who has been away from the church) to consider coming to Mass or coming to one of our other parish functions or exploring the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults? Can you think of other ordinary ways that we can welcome others at St. Joseph's?

On this wonderful weekend of Pentecost, may God's Spirit pervade our Masses and our community that others will feel tangibly in our hospitality that the Spirit is truly alive here.