Theology of Hospitality

Hospitality in its truest form is a profound expression of love. The road to true Christian hospitality begins with our own conversion as people and as a Church. Like most matters of faith, the call to change our minds and hearts is a journey. But, we have a great Teacher.

Jesus was the master of hospitality not because of his charismatic personality or his great storytelling ability but first and foremost because of the lens through which he saw others. Unlike the people of his time, Jesus saw everyone through the lens of Divine love. His natural ability to exercise extreme hospitality was obvious in his treatment of women, children, the poor, the wealthy, the tax collectors, the Romans, the Jews and especially those who would become the craftsmen and craftswomen of his Church. There was no judgment, there was no expectation, there was only invitation. It was the ability to be hospitable not to gain something but for the sake of love, itself.

Today’s culture often confuses entertainment with hospitality. This hospitality is often targeted at a certain audience and assumes the guest will reciprocate in some way. As families and friends we take turns hosting Thanksgiving and Christmas gatherings as we share in the financial cost and labor in preparing for the event. Hospitality in its truest form has no motivation other than inclusion though it has the potential to reap Divine benefits. Consider Abraham and Sarah’s surprise visit by three angels in Genesis 18 or Paul’s reminder to “not neglect hospitality” (Hebrews 13) because we might be “entertaining angels.”

Hospitality can be risky when it challenges the current practice of a parish. Jesus’ own Tradition was threatened by his radical hospitality and his willingness to embrace people from all walks of life. For some, to embrace others means to risk their own place within the Community. To be open to others also means to be open to the giftedness and voice they will bring to the Church.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, hospitality in its truest form has the potential to grow a Church from a small band of disciples to a global Community of over a billion members. Hospitality in the manner of Jesus carries many promises. For the Diocese of Green Bay in the Lenten Season of 2010, the promise is to welcome our brothers and sisters in Baptism, home.

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