

JESUS: OUR MODEL OF HOSPITALITY

It is a basic principal of human nature that each of us wants to be accepted by others.

Whether it is with our family, a group of friends, the community where we live, a club or co-workers on the job, we want to be in relationship with other people. We may find acceptance at our parish Mass when we are acknowledged by others with a smile, the look of welcome or a friendly hello. Like the family, the parish should be a place where everyone is welcomed.

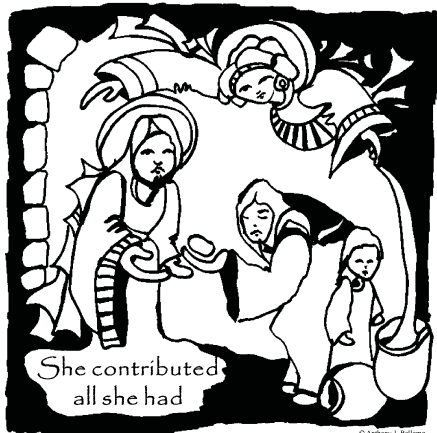
Jesus taught us this when He said that His love comes from the Father and that God's love is the same love with which He loves us. Because Jesus loves us, we, in turn, are to love others. One way to express the love of Jesus is through our acts of hospitality. The biblical definition of hospitality is the love of strangers, as well as people we know. In the Book of Genesis, Abraham ran from his tent to beg three travelers to accept his acts of love. Hospitality to strangers is an ancient practice. Such a view seems to stand in contrast to our society's understanding that, for the most part, extends hospitality only to those whom we know.

Today's first reading is one, among many in the Bible, that speaks of the importance of hospitality in the lives of the people. At the time of the First Book of Kings, which we heard today, hospitality was understood differently from how we understand it today. For the people of that time, it was the right of the person who was traveling to be received as the guest anywhere and at any time. In turn, it was the duty of the host to welcome the stranger into their tent and to serve them. The widow in our reading knew that she was obligated to welcome Elijah, but she tried unsuccessfully to discourage him. Reluctantly, she gave in to Elijah's requests and extended hospitality to him.

Why was she reluctant? Like all widows of her time, she had very little to sustain herself. She held no power or standing as a widow because her status in the community had been an extension of her husband's. Although she possessed little, she gave a portion of what she had to a total stranger. The hospitality she extended to Elijah was a courageous act; a kindness that might or might not be extended to her some day.

In today's Gospel, Jesus contrasts the behavior of the rich people with a poor widow. He used the occasion of people depositing donations in the Temple treasury to point out to his disciples a very important lesson about true love. According to Jesus, it meant nothing for the people who had great wealth to give large amounts to the treasury. While it was a nice gesture, they were, in effect, giving from what they had left over. They would not miss their donation nor would it affect anything about their lives. In contrast, the new widow contributed all the money that she had.

Even though her few pennies were far less than the big donations, Jesus tells us that she had given more than all the others. For Jesus, it was the fact that, in an act of love, she gave from what little she had. The lesson for the disciples, and for each of us, is that we must also lovingly and generously give of our time, talent and treasure, and trust that God will take care of the rest.



The widow of Zarephath had only a handful of flower and a little oil, but made a little cake for Elijah.....1 Kings 17:10-16