

16th Sunday, Ordinary C

A young Benedictine monk had questions about his Order's motto: "**Pray and Work.**" So one day the abbot invited him to row across the lake with him. The abbot rowed—but with only one oar. As a result the boat went in circles, and they made no progress. The young monk said, "Abbot, unless you row with both oars, you won't get anywhere." The Abbot replied, "You're right, my son! The one oar is prayer and the other oar is work. Unless you use both of them together, you just.... go in circles."

This story illustrates something of what our readings are about today and there are three points we should try to take home with us:

Point #1: It is a good and noble thing to be hospitable--to welcome the poor, the stranger and the guest and make them feel at home.

As Abraham found out, one should always welcome the stranger because you never know when it might be God who is passing by.

When three men who are passing through his encampment arrive, Abraham goes NUTS with hospitality. He gets water to wash their feet.... He gets Sarah to bake some home-made bread, and then slaughters the best calf in his herd and has a barbeque. If that wasn't enough.... then he waits on them, like a servant.... rather than sitting down with them at the meal!

Abraham could have called his servants to take care of his guests, but he does it himself. He desires to serve.

And these three guests graciously accept it. They just sit around in the shade of a tree, being refreshed, while this man and his wife go overboard with kindness.

Abraham expected nothing in return, yet he receives his reward. His sterile and very old wife will give birth to Isaac--and, well, the rest is history. A great nation, Israel, comes from Abraham and we are his spiritual heirs.

Hospitality matters.

Point #2: When we do the ordinary work of our lives, we must be aware of the presence of God.

Jesus adds something to this idea of hospitality in the Gospel today. Luke tells us that Son of God is passing by and stops at the home of Martha and Mary and Lazarus.

And it is Martha... who invites Him in.

Now, if Martha had a last name, it might as well have been "Stewart".

Her home must have been a fury of activity.

I do not think she was making Mac & Cheese and a couple packs of hot dogs like I might have done; she was likely preparing an impromptu feast for at least 13 hungry men and possibly many, many more. She was doing what Abraham did but on an even grander scale.

Martha, showed great hospitality. In fact, the Greek word used for her service is *diakonos* and this is where we get the word deacon, so I am a bit

biased towards Martha. But her service lacked something important. It was missing the “better part” of proper motivation.

We heard that Mary was just sitting, listening to our Lord talk. And Martha gets steamed because Mary isn't helping. It is then that Jesus clues us in to what hospitality, what “*diakonos*” should be:

"Martha," he says, "it's wonderful that you work so hard for us, and that is good, but you have to do it for the right reason. I am here with you, and Mary is glad, but you are just too busy to enjoy my presence”.

It is more important to recognize the presence of God as we do the ordinary things of life, than to just do these ordinary things without acknowledging that Jesus in our midst....that is the “better part” Mary has chosen"

Like Mary, we need to recognize the presence of God among us, but like Martha, we must also invite Him in.

This isn't an easy thing to do. Believe me, I know. I probably fail at it more than I have any successes.

It's so easy to be a Martha!

My friend Joe refers to it as living as “human doings” rather than “human beings”. When we are “human doings” exclusively, we run the risk of burning ourselves out, even in service to... and for ...our God.

That's why we need to spend time with Jesus, learning from Him, enjoying "being" in His presence, and, like the three men in Genesis "being" refreshed, not by food and water, but by His Spirit.

Martha and Mary teach us *the need for balance* between work and prayer.

What we need, is to have a "Mary heart" in a "Martha world".

So, to summarize Point #2... We can affirm that our work and our service matters, and so does our attitude towards it.

Point #3: If we do these two things--be hospitable and recognize the presence of God in what we do in service for others, then we....as St. Paul says it... fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.

I know.....That is a strange saying! It seems to say that Christ didn't do enough for us, but really it's saying something else.

Christ redeemed us all by His Cross, but how do we really experience that? A lot of people don't experience the power of Christ's redemptive suffering. Immediately, the non-believer comes to mind, but it is also true for many Christians. Some might know it intellectually, and others might even know it by faith, but they have yet to experience HIM!

When we are hospitable and extend God's love to people, when we invite the presence of Christ into our midst as we do our daily work, we become transformed.

We become a bridge so that Christ's saving grace can touch others!

In our service, our *diakonos* in the ordinary stuff of our seemingly ordinary day, we do fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ to build up the Body of Christ.

Our 3rd point reminds us that...service ...with Christ at its center ... is a form of sacrament; bringing the reality of Jesus to everyone we meet.

(Pause)

So, with all of that in mind, we will soon receive among us, here on this altar, the real presence of Jesus Christ.

Let us welcome Him as did Martha and Mary, offering Him all of our service and worship.

And may we all grow in hospitality, and caring toward all whom we meet, so that we may bring those we encounter into the presence of our Blessed Lord.