

Daring Hospitality

Although seemingly simple, warm and comforting, hospitality at its best is radical and prophetic. Let us hear this word spoken in our scriptures and tradition, inviting us into new thinking, challenging us to “daring hospitality.”

Hospitality was an essential aspect of Israelite culture, embedded in sacred codes of conduct requiring that strangers be given food, water and shelter. Abraham’s first action after God’s call into covenant was to offer hospitality to three strangers, not knowing that God sent them, “Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree” (Gen 18:4).

The Shunammite woman spoke to her husband about Elisha, the holy man of God, “Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp” (2 Kgs 4: 9-10).

God is described in Ps 23:4, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”



The same sacred code is embedded in the New Testament. Jesus invited the first disciples to his home, saying, “Come and see” (Jn 1:39). He shared meals with the most likely and most unlikely people: his friends, Martha, Mary and Lazarus; Peter’s mother-in-law, tax collectors, rich men, a prostitute, five thousand men, women and children; his apostles.

He met a Samaritan woman at a well and asked for a drink. He defined “neighbour” by a Samaritan traveller’s response to an injured man, “He put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him” (Lk 10:34). The first Christian community “broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:46).



When Jesus was asked how to become a faithful follower, his words were stark, clear and reflective of his people’s code of conduct, “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Matt 25:35-36).



Like Abraham, Jesus began his ministry with a meal, attending the wedding feast at Cana. He ended his ministry by serving his disciples bread and wine at the supper before his death. After his Resurrection, he helped the disciples know him as transformed by sharing a meal with them: Mary and Cleopas at Emmaus, the disciples in the Upper Room, the disciples on the beach.

Key moments in Jesus' life and moments in which he led the disciples to significantly shift their thinking were marked by hospitality.

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The traditions that make up Kildare Ministries have used hospitality as an essential element of their works. Nano and Daniel met Jesus' challenge head on. Nano started schools in Cork for poor children at great risk to herself. She became known for her visitation of the local poor which brought them great comfort.

Daniel established schools for the poor in his diocese and brought people together in public celebrations, again a risky exercise.

Kildare Ministries brings together two stories that have created ministries of hospitality: schools and community works.

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Who are the strangers that we as Kildare Ministries invite to our tables? Who do we not even think about inviting?

When and where are we, as Kildare Ministries, being invited as strangers? What does it mean for us to be the receivers of hospitality?



With respect and reverence that the unknown between us might flower into discovery and lead us beyond the familiar field blind with the weed of weariness and old walls of habit.

*O'Donohue, J. Benedictus
2007*

Let us pray:

Lord, turn our praises into hands that clothe the naked,
arms that comfort the afflicted,
tables that host the stranger,
and shoulders that support the weary
so that your name may be praised
by those who live and die
with their backs against the wall.

Amen.

