



Kildare  
MINISTRIES

# Hospitality

Philoxenia (Love of Stranger)

Kenosis (Self-emptying)

Counter to Marginalisation

Encounter

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Love & Mercy



# Philoxenia — Love of Stranger

## Scripture Luke 24:13-32

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had

indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'

## Notes

**P**hiloxenia, (Greek for 'love of stranger'), was inculcated as a virtue long before Christianity. For ancient civilisations it was considered the pillar on which all morality rested, with Homer's *Odyssey* describing it as a "measure of society's moral health". The people of ancient Israel saw themselves as strangers in a foreign land thus took the responsibility to care for vulnerable strangers very seriously. Indeed, in no fewer than 36

places does the Hebrew bible command us to love the stranger because the stranger shows us God.

***Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Heb 13:1-2)***

In the Gospels, hospitality is intimately connected with love. It extends far beyond the notion of transactional



# Philoxenia — Love of Stranger



service; we pay for service, in fact our entire culture is built upon it. In counter-cultural fashion Jesus acted as both host and stranger – certainly he relied on the hospitality of others but as gracious host he exemplified the willingness to welcome those with nothing to offer in return. He portrayed a delicate balance between host and stranger, insider and outsider, master and servant, first and last, giver and receiver... and each component mattered equally. In so doing he placed mutuality and dignity at the centre of human relationships.

A stranger is always seen from the perspective of one who is an insider. It is the insider who sets the boundaries and defines the terms by which the stranger is perceived. The stranger is by definition out of place and thus at a position of disadvantage or vulnerability. On the journey to Emmaus Jesus demonstrated the value of welcoming a stranger. Cleopas and his companion were insiders and Jesus was the outsider. Yet, it was precisely as stranger that Jesus enlightened the insiders, bringing to them an understanding of their own story, causing their hearts to burn and giving them hope.

## When you are the Stranger, I am in control

*The story goes like this:*

**Y**ou, the stranger, have come from somewhere else and have arrived at my place: I am at home, at the centre of my familiar world. Therefore, I have higher status than you and can orchestrate the encounter. I do not know much about your own background and may not be very interested. But because I am a cultured and socially responsible person, I will take care of you and indulge you, though not, of course, indefinitely. We have a proverb that says “on the first day, the stranger/guest smells sweet; on the second day the smell is getting stale; by the third day, the smell is like a dead fish.”

I am in control, and I will ask you polite questions about your background, though I do not expect long-winded and detailed answers. I do, however, expect you to appreciate what I offer you, and indeed what I possess, both materially and in terms of my personal status. I can afford to indulge you, but you should acknowledge my generosity. You don't need to worry about anything: I will look after you.

Actually I feel a bit sorry for you. You don't seem to have much initiative, and some of the things you say are really quaint and odd. You are a bit strange. I'm glad I'm not you.

There are gifts only a stranger can bring:

1. a different history and life experience
2. different resources, with potentially creative solutions to common problems
3. expanding the world merely by virtue of being there and being a catalyst for change
4. renewed energy or motivation
5. opportunity to examine the closeness of borders
6. a mediator or bridge-builder for a community's internal factions
7. potential to be marginal, ambiguous, challenging while personally disinterested

Any community which embodies warm hospitality to strangers contradicts contemporary messages about who is valuable, inviting growth. Such communities are places of hope that the world does not have to exist in class and racial warfare.

## When I am the Stranger, you are in control

*In reverse circumstances, the story might read as follows:*

**I**, the stranger, have come from far away and I am tired. I am glad to be here with you, and though I would dearly like my privacy and freedom, I am truly grateful for your hospitality. Nevertheless, I will be glad to get home again. I really don't know what is expected of me, and I feel both useless and self-conscious. It's quite pleasant to be looked after, but I have no idea of what will happen next, and I feel powerless to do anything about it.

You are very kind, and yet I find I am always trying to please you and to read your mind. I want to give you the answers that you seem to want, so I look for clues in the kinds of questions you ask. But this is rather enervating: I can't relax.

I have my own thoughts and patterns of behaviour, but you don't seem to want to know about them. I always feel that I'm being scrutinized. Actually, I'm beginning to feel very resentful of you and all you have, and even of the relaxed way you sit there being kind to me. I feel you are sometimes just a poseur, and if I could get up and leave, I would. But I'm stuck here.

*Anthony Gittins, A Presence that Disturbs*





# Philoxenia — Love of Stranger

## Questions for reflection

1. Consider the experiences of host and stranger. Do any elements of these surprise you?
2. Who are the strangers in our ministries? In our nation or world?
3. Do we recognise the gifts strangers bring to our community?

## Closing Prayer

This night Jesus offers us a place at the table:

Where we have made it our business to be first in the queue, as though it were our right;  
he asks us to hang back and wait on the generosity of others.

Where we have ensured that the scales would always be tipped in our favour;  
he asks us to empty our pockets and hold out our begging bowl.

Where we have spent too long at table with those who  
bolster our image and protect our security;  
he asks us to share bread with the excluded and the forgotten.

Where we have 'ummed' and 'aahed', taking too long to choose  
from the vast array of food on offer;  
he asks us to sit alongside those whose stomachs are rumbling.

This night Jesus offers us a place at the table.

*(Dilly Baker, A Place at the Table)*





# Kenosis — Self-emptying

**Scripture** Mt 25:31-46

## The Judgement of the Nations

‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for 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.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and

gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

## Notes

**T**his passage in Matthew’s Gospel powerfully connects hospitality towards fellow humans. The act of welcoming the stranger takes on heightened significance when it is Jesus himself being welcomed. The sight of Jesus does not eclipse the particular human being who stands there in need, but it challenges Christians to offer the most gracious welcome possible.

Central to the narrative is the reminder from Jesus: **“I was the stranger.”** The notion of **kenosis** is key to the paradigm of hospitality and key to the mission of Jesus. It refers to a denial of the status that lifts us above others, a self-emptying. As Jesus demonstrated by washing the feet of Peter (Jn 13:1-7) we cannot be hospitable if we presume arrogance over others. The question for Peter, as it is for us today, could he allow such humility?





# Kenosis — Self-emptying

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (Phil 2:1-11)*

We can be very good at identifying the other as stranger and being welcoming, but less good at remembering that sometimes we are the stranger which means relinquishing control and humbling ourselves. If we could learn to sit in either role it would significantly shift power structures in our relationships. As host Jesus gathered people, made them welcome, served them and restored dignity to outcasts. As stranger he relinquished all status and offered himself to others.

To embrace the role of stranger is to embrace ambiguity, uncertainty, surrender and vulnerability. The receiver becomes a giver as the outsider is encountered and embraced. From the moment of his birth Jesus was a stranger: the homeless child of homeless parents, living at the margins of civilised society and dying in disgrace outside the city walls. His own community neither recognised nor received him but outsiders did. Perhaps that is the challenge of discipleship; to encounter boundaries of discrimination and to attempt to erase them by graciousness, vulnerability, hospitality and compassion.

It is not enough to simply welcome 'the other' into our world if we remain at the centre. We are called also to leave our own comfort and place ourselves at the edge of other people's world, to become strangers ourselves – otherwise we risk becoming gatekeepers rather than disciples who risk encounters...

**outside-in** = we are commanded to welcome the stranger

**inside-out** = we are commissioned to go to the margins and to the marginalised people

**displacement** = willing to become strangers ourselves, the cross boundaries into the world of the other

**transformation** = embracing radical simplicity and committing to intentional redistribution of wealth and security to encounter our most invisible and alienated neighbours

**conversion** = to become as concerned about strangers and aliens as we are about our own security

## Questions for reflection

1. Why is the experience of being a stranger crucial to being a good and gracious host?
2. Our ministries are all places of warm welcome. How can we challenge our staff and students to 'become the stranger'?
3. What do we risk through *kenosis*?

## Closing Prayer

Jesus,

you stooped to the ground making yourself vulnerable for those you loved.

Release us from the need to dominate and may we recognise you in the faces of the weakest.

Jesus,

you were intimate in love, holding close the one who leant on your breast.

Help us to be open to giving and receiving love, that we might honour in our lives your prayer for us to live as one.

Jesus,

you wept as you faced the horror of your future.

We pray for all who are weeping tonight, for those who fear the future and for those who are facing their death alone.

Jesus,

you knelt alone in silence.

We pray for ourselves in our aloneness – for those parts of us that cannot be shared with others,

those parts that we hardly dare own ourselves.

Hold us, this night and every night, in your embrace,

Amen

*(adapted from Dilly Baker, A Place at the Table)*





# Counter to Marginalisation

**Scripture** Luke 10:25-37

## The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and

when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

## Notes

**T**he Parable of the Good Samaritan opens our scope of responsibility to anyone in need, offering an expanded definition of 'neighbour'. Hospitality forces us to consider in practical terms who our neighbour is so that we are called to care for *actual neighbours, strangers, and enemies*. The claim of universal love and welcome has to be accompanied by welcoming an *actual person* into a *real place*.

Similarly, within the early Christian communities Peter enacted the mission of Jesus (Acts 9:32-11:18) by transacting the gender divide and touching the 'unclean'. These narratives demonstrate that God shows no partiality, breaking our tribal approach to who is in and who is out.

***"When people are socially invisible, their needs and concerns are not acknowledged and no one even notices the injustices they suffer. Hospitality can begin a journey toward visibility and respect."***

*Christine Pohl, Making Room*

Hospitality has a subversive and countercultural dimension, especially when socially undervalued persons are welcomed. It can act as a challenge to the values and expectations of the larger community and can transform the community when a person who is not valued is welcomed in by one who is. The Christian tradition at its heart emphasises our interconnectedness, taking pleasure in difference. This is however, deeply counter-cultural. Humanity has a cultural propensity







for inclusion/exclusion, hospitality/xenophobia, equity/discrimination. Our deep human need for 'people like us' is contradicted by a great human suspicion of 'people like them'. Sadly, the lived experience of Christianity contains a history of mistaking difference for inferiority, emphasising difference at the expense of resemblance and perpetuating the very barriers Jesus came to heal. There has been a tendency to distort the story of the Good Samaritan by twisting the meaning of neighbour until it comes to mean 'someone like me', disregarding anyone 'not like me'.

The ministry of Jesus illustrates the possibility and challenge of moving from centres of privilege to the margins where missionary encounters take place. Jesus made the conscious choice to live as an outsider, attracted by the margins and marginalised people. As a freely chosen outsider Jesus lived with the freedom to mix with other outsiders, deliberately extending his partiality to every person excluded by the religious or political establishment. In contemporary terms we would express this as a *preferential option for the poor*: the heart of the liberating mission of Jesus.

We too are challenged to identify sinful structures that create strangers and outsiders, distorting and dehumanising them. Unless each of us is committed to creating new communities, transforming us/them into WE then Christianity will remain a dream. Our own lives may appear relatively integrated with others 'like us', but as long as we are separated from strangers they are not fully integrated. Discipleship calls us to this.

## Questions for reflection

Reflecting on our own community, our nation and our world...

1. What makes hospitality potentially subversive and countercultural?
2. What are the consequences when persons are excluded or denied welcome?
3. How are hospitality and power related?
4. What are the challenges and difficulties of recovering hospitality today?
5. How can we sustain and nurture hospitality so that it becomes a vibrant and life-giving practice?

## Closing Prayer

We gather today mindful of the many times  
we have professed our readiness to be true disciples  
of Jesus  
to be salt of the earth, to be light in the world.

We acknowledge the daunting challenge of this  
profession in the society in which we live,  
with its economic systems that impoverish and  
disempower people,  
and its political systems that enable the rich to get  
richer and the earth to become poorer.

We remember that Jesus encountered in his day  
systems as unjust as those we experience in our day,  
and who surely felt powerless to change anything on  
his own.

We turn our hearts and minds to his message  
to his hopes and dreams, to his ardent desire for a  
better society.

We focus on his struggle, his reflections, his prayer,  
his questions –  
where to start? how to start? what to say? whom to  
choose?  
how to keep going? how to be salt? how to be light?

We call to mind how Jesus urged his listeners  
to put their trust in the power of being neighbour  
in the power of God's spirit within them  
in the power of conversion from religious thinking  
and practices  
that made them feel inadequate and worthless.

Our prayer today is a prayer of resolve,  
a prayer of determination that we, each one of us,  
will do whatever we can  
however small in whatever way  
to bring the real dream of Jesus  
to fruition in our lives and in our world today.

(Michael Morwood, *Prayers for Progressive Christians*)





# Encounter

**Scripture** Genesis 18:1-14

### A Son Promised to Abraham and Sarah

The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, 'My lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.' So they said, 'Do as you have said.' And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.' Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and

milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' Then one said, 'I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.' And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?' The LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, "Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?" Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.'

### Notes

**T**he graciousness with which Abraham welcomed his guests is a typical cultural practice of the time. The connection between hospitality and the presence of God is shown through the promise and blessing received. Hospitality is expressed here as God's intimate encounter with us, if we allow it. The welcome offered to the stranger enriches us through the encounter – the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah turned their barrenness into fertility.

### The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers (3<sup>rd</sup> century)

**“**One elder who lived all alone undertook a seventy-week fast, eating only once a week during all that time in order to become more receptive to God. When he was little

*more than bone and vapour, he asked God to reveal to him the meaning of a certain Bible passage, but God would not do it. The elder, disappointed by how little his fast had done for him, decided to go ask one of his brothers what the passage meant. The minute he closed the door to his cell, an angel of God appeared to him, saying, "Your seventy-week fast did not bring you one step closer to God, but now that you have humbled yourself enough to go to your brother, God sent me to reveal the meaning of the passage." Then the angel told the elder what it meant and went away.*

*I like to think that the elder went on to visit his brother anyway, breaking his fast with him and swapping stories about what a trickster God was. At the very least, most of us need someone to tell our stories to. At a deeper level,*







*most of us need someone to help us forget ourselves, a little or a lot. The great wisdom traditions of the world all recognise that the main impediment to living a life of meaning is being self-absorbed."*

*(Barbara Brown Taylor, An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith)*

The Desert Fathers teach us that the hardest spiritual work in the world is to love the neighbour as self – to encounter a fellow human not as someone you can use, change, fix, help, save, convince or control but as someone who can draw you out from your own self. The world's greatest religions have always required communities of people to make them work, but we must remain conscious that the central convictions and values within the community not only keep it together, they can act to keep others out! The practice of encountering the 'other' allows for the possibility that this is one of the faces of God. What we have most in common with each other is not religion but humanity; while religion teaches us that encountering another human is as close to God as I may ever get. The point is not to see through the person to God but to see the person in front of me for who they really are, more than just another person in my story.

The entire ministry of Jesus could be described as loving encounter. The teaching of Jesus was not limited to those who looked, acted or thought like him – no one was dismissed from his circle of concern (Mt 25:34-37). Hospitality is not an optional extra for followers of Jesus, nor is it limited to those with a gift for it. It is an absolute necessity in any community of faith.

## Honouring the stranger-guest-host relationship

**"O**ur biblical tradition reveals a God who is love, a God who is hospitality. God creates out of selfless hospitable love, invites a people to be a covenanted guest, and implants within this chosen people a law of hospitality to strangers. Accordingly, Abraham, by being the host to strangers, offers hospitality to God.

Jesus, God's beloved, the one who comes among us as visitor and guest becomes the host who offers the hospitality of acceptance, compassion and forgiveness. He tells stories about extravagant hospitality to people "not like us", to sinners, enemies and those who are ethnically and religiously "other".

For me, this rich spiritual tradition of hospitality and honouring the stranger-guest-host relationship, is a potent challenge to the politics surrounding our treatment of asylum

seekers and refugees. More personally, it challenges my familial, communal and work relationships.

The virtue of hospitality invites me to be host, not only to a person, but to his way of being that persists in being so different from mine. Hospitality invites me to accept an individual and also to respect her universe and her temple of meaning, that is, how she uniquely understands or makes sense of events, relationships and herself.

Hospitable people have richer lives. Indeed, they have more fun! It stands to reason. Horizons are expanded and experiences are multiplied as conversation and story-telling turn strangers into mutual hosts and guests, indeed into sisters and brothers."

*Patty Fawcner SGS, The Good Oil November 2018*

## Questions for reflection

1. Consider the ways in which the hospitality offered by our ministry provides opportunities for deep encounters.
2. What gifts do encounters with 'the other' bring to our lives? To our communities?
3. In what ways do they confront our sense of identity, or challenge our accepted practices?

## Closing Prayer

*Blessing on meeting a stranger...*

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.

*(John O'Donohue, Benedictus)*





# Table fellowship

**Scripture** Luke 19:1-10

## Jesus and Zacchaeus

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.'

Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'

## Notes

As the marginalised one offering hospitality to Jesus, Zacchaeus found himself drawn into a wider hospitality – the hospitality of God. The key aspect of this narrative is how the removal of the label and stigma of human judgement provided the opportunity for transformation. Luke's gospel in particular embraces the deep symbolic value of meals. A shared meal is a sign of deeper solidarity between dining companions. Through meals, Jesus reflects the action of God who is essentially hospitable.

The charge was regularly thrown against Jesus that he was a "glutton and a drunkard, friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Lk 7:34, Mt 11:19). Throughout his ministry Jesus welcomed the rejected and excluded, especially at

meals. It came to be a publicly identifiable characteristic of the community of disciples and a visible expression of liberation, welcoming those who had been excluded by a legalistic religious leadership. The social system of **reciprocal generosity** could only be entered into by those with the means to reciprocate, thus meals were only shared amongst people of the same social status as only they could show the host the appropriate honour. Those without means, social misfits or the physically impaired were excluded as they were unable to reciprocate. By extension, sharing a meal with someone 'lower down' the social order risked incurring shame and exclusion. Jesus completely subverted this thinking (Lk 14:12-14) so that those guests normally excluded were all invited.





# Table Fellowship

By gathering at the table with anyone, anywhere, Jesus completely changed the rules about who was in and who was out, relocating the field of mission to the margins. Sharing a meal expresses mutuality, recognition, acceptance and equal regard, breaking down boundaries within and across communities. By dining with people from different backgrounds, as both host and guest, Jesus demonstrated how the intimacy of a shared meal can forge relationship of dignity and respect, transforming lives.

**T**he table is one of the most intimate places in our lives. It is there that we give ourselves to one another. When we say, "Take some more, let me serve you another plate, let me pour you another glass, don't be shy, enjoy it," we say a lot more than our words express. We invite our friends to become part of our lives. We want them to be nurtured by the same food and drink that nurture us. We desire communion. That is why a refusal to eat and drink what a host offers is so offensive. It feels like a rejection of an invitation to intimacy. Strange as it may sound, the table is the place where we want to become food for one another. Every breakfast, lunch, or dinner can become a time of growing communion with one another.

Henri Nouwen

## Questions for Reflection

1. Why is eating together so important?
2. How can we ensure our celebrations and rituals reflect our desire for communion? Is there more we can do symbolically and practically to celebrate the experience of a shared meal?
3. For whom is there no place at the table?



## Closing Prayer

May an abundance of gratitude burst forth as you reflect upon what you have received.

May thanksgiving overflow in your heart, and often be proclaimed in your prayer.

May you gather around the table of your heart the ardent faithfulness, kindness and goodness of each person who is true to you.

May the harvest of your good actions bring forth plentiful fruit each day.

May you discover a cache of hidden wisdom among the people and events that have brought you distress and sorrow.

May your basket of blessings surprise you with its rich diversity of gifts and its opportunities for growth.

May all that nourishes and resources your life bring you daily satisfaction and renewed hope.

May you slow your hurried pace of life so you can be aware of, and enjoy, what you too easily take for granted.

May you always be open, willing, and ready to share your blessings with others.

May you never forget the Generous One who loves you lavishly and unconditionally.

(Joyce Rupp, *Out of the Ordinary*)







# Presence

**Scripture** Lk 10:38-42

## Jesus Visits Martha and Mary

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you

not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

## Notes

*Pope Francis, The Angelus, 17 July 2016*

**"I**n bustling about and busying herself, Martha risks forgetting — and this is the problem — the most important thing, which is the presence of the guest, Jesus in this case. She forgets about the presence of the guest. A guest is not merely to be served, fed, looked after in every way. Most importantly he ought to be listened to. Remember this word: Listen! A guest should be welcomed as a person, with a story, his heart rich with feelings and thoughts, so that he may truly feel like he is among family. If you welcome a guest into your home but continue doing other things, letting him just sit there, both of you in silence, it is as if he were of stone: a guest of stone. No. A guest is to be listened to. Of course, Jesus' response to Martha — when he tells her that there is only one thing that needs to be done — finds its full significance in reference to listening to the very word of Jesus, that word which illuminates and supports all that we are and what we do. If we go to pray, for example, before the Crucifix, and we talk, talk, talk, and then we leave, we do not listen to Jesus. We do not allow him to speak to our heart. Listen: this is the key word. Do not forget! And we must not forget that in the house of Martha and Mary, Jesus, before being Lord and

Master, is a pilgrim and guest. Thus, his response has this significance first and foremost: "Martha, Martha why do you busy yourself doing so much for this guest even to the point of forgetting about his presence? — A guest of stone! — Not much is necessary to welcome him; indeed, only one thing is needed: listen to him — this is the word: listen to him — be brotherly to him, let him realize he is among family and not in a temporary shelter.

Understood in this light, hospitality, which is one of the works of mercy, is revealed as a truly human and Christian virtue, a virtue which in today's world is at risk of being overlooked. In fact, nursing homes and hospices are multiplying, but true hospitality is not always practised in these environments. Various institutions are opened to care for many types of disease, of loneliness, of marginalization, but opportunities are decreasing for those who are foreign, marginalized, excluded, from finding someone ready to listen to them: because they are foreigners, refugees, migrants. Listen to that painful story. Even in one's own home, among one's own family members, it might be easier to find services and care of various kinds rather than listening and welcome. Today we are so taken, by excitement, by countless problems — some of which are not important — that we lack the







capacity to listen. We are constantly busy and thus we have no time to listen. I would like to ask you, to pose a question to you, each one answer in your own heart: do you, husband, take time to listen to your wife? And do you, woman, take time to listen to your husband? Do you, parents, take time, time to “waste”, to listen to your children? or your grandparents, the elderly? — “But grandparents always say the same things, they are boring...” — But they need to be listened to! Listen. I ask that you learn to listen and to devote more of your time. The root of peace lies in the capacity to listen.”

***This is the first, the wildest and the wisest thing I know: that the soul exists and is built entirely out of attentiveness***

*Mary Oliver*

## **The Old Grandfather's Corner (The Brothers Grimm)**

Once upon a time there was a very old man who lived with his son and daughter-in-law. His eyes were dim, his knees tottered under him when he walked, and he was very deaf. As he sat at table his hand shook so that he would often spill the soup over the table-cloth or on his clothes, and sometimes he could not even keep it in his mouth when it got there. His son and daughter were so annoyed to see his conduct at the table that at last they placed a chair for him in a corner behind the screen, and gave him his meals in an earthenware basin quite away from the rest. He would often look sorrowfully at the table with tears in his eyes, but he did not complain.

One day, while he was thinking sadly of the past, the earthen-ware basin, which he could scarcely hold in his trembling hands, fell to the ground and was broken. The young wife scolded him well for being so careless, but he did not reply, only sighed deeply. Then she bought him a wooden bowl for a penny and gave him his meals in it. Some days afterward his son and daughter saw their little boy, who was about four years old, sitting on the ground and trying to fasten together some pieces of wood. “What are you making, my boy?” asked his father. “I am making a little bowl for papa and mamma to eat their food in when I grow up,” he replied. The husband and wife looked at each other without speaking for some minutes. At last they began to shed tears, and went and brought their old father back to the table, and from that day he always took his meals with them and was never again treated unkindly.

## **Questions for Reflection**

1. In what ways does our ‘doing’ interfere with out ‘being’? What impact does this have on our relationships? As individuals? As a community?
2. Are there people within our community who feel hidden or silenced? What can we do to create room for their stories to be heard?

***Grant me to recognise in other men and women my God,  
the radiance of your own face***

*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

## **Closing Prayer**

### **Suggestions for Giving the Present of Presence**

Be with someone who needs you.  
Be with a person who gives you hope.  
Be with those who live in terror and fear.  
Be with an older person.  
Be with someone who has helped you to grow.  
Be with one who is in pain.  
Be with a war-torn country.  
Be with yourself.  
Be with someone who has written to you.  
Be with a child.  
Be with a refugee who is feeling from harm.  
Be with an enemy or someone you dislike.  
Be with a farmer losing his or her land.  
Be with some who has terminal illness.  
Be with the homeless.  
Be with those who suffer from substance abuse.  
Be with hungry children.  
Be with a co-worker.  
Be with those whose hope is faint.  
Be with world leaders.  
Be with someone in your family.  
Be with men and women in prison.  
Be with someone working for justice.  
Be with those who are abused and neglected.  
Be with your loved ones.

*(Joyce Rupp, Out of the Ordinary)*





# Love and Mercy

**Scripture** Luke 6:20-23

## Blessings and Woes

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

‘Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

‘Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

## Notes

In his 2018 Encyclical *Gaudete et exsultate*, Pope Francis brought to the world a vision of holiness grounded in ordinary living, utterly incompatible with individualism. In it he employed the phrase “middle class of sainthood” in the sense that it is a lifestyle available to everyone. Throughout he emphasised a balance between the mystical and active dimensions of a Christian life, marked by love for God and neighbour expressed through perseverance, patience, meekness, joy, a sense of humour, boldness, passion and prayer. *Guadete et exsultate* insists that holiness does not require the creation of special habitats but rather to reach out to others.

In a chapter dedicated to the Beatitudes (Lk 6), Francis equated holiness with love and mercy shown to fellow neighbours:

... We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people (#6)

... In every one of our brothers and sisters, especially the least, the most vulnerable, the defenceless and those in need, God’s very image is found (#61)

... Blessed are those who mourn; such people are unafraid to share in the suffering of others. They discover the meaning of life by coming to the aid of those who suffer. They feel compassion for others in such a way that all distance vanishes (#76)

... Mercy involves giving, helping and serving others, but it also forgiveness and understanding (#80)

... There can be no love without works of love. The Lord expects a commitment to our brothers and sisters that comes from the heart, a heart that loves God and neighbour genuinely and not merely in words (#85-86)

... It is not easy to make peace which excludes no one but embraces even those who are a bit odd, troublesome or difficult, demanding, different, beaten down by life or simply uninterested. It is hard work; it calls for great openness of mind and heart. Nor can it attempt to ignore or disregard conflict. We need to be artisans of peace, for building peace is a craft that demands serenity, creativity, sensitivity and skill (#89)







... In the call to recognise Jesus in the poor and suffering we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices (#96)

... If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance, an idler, an obstacle in my path, a troubling sight, a problem for politicians to sort out, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can respond with faith and charity, and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own, a creature infinitely loved by the Father, an image of God, a brother or sister redeemed by Jesus Christ (#98)

... We cannot uphold an ideal of holiness that would ignore injustice in a world where some revel, spend with abandon and love only for the latest consumer goods, even as others look on from afar, living their entire lives in abject poverty (#101)

... In today's world too, we are called to follow the path of spiritual wisdom proposed by the prophet Isaiah to show what is pleasing to God: Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? (#103)

... Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others (#141)

## Questions for Reflection

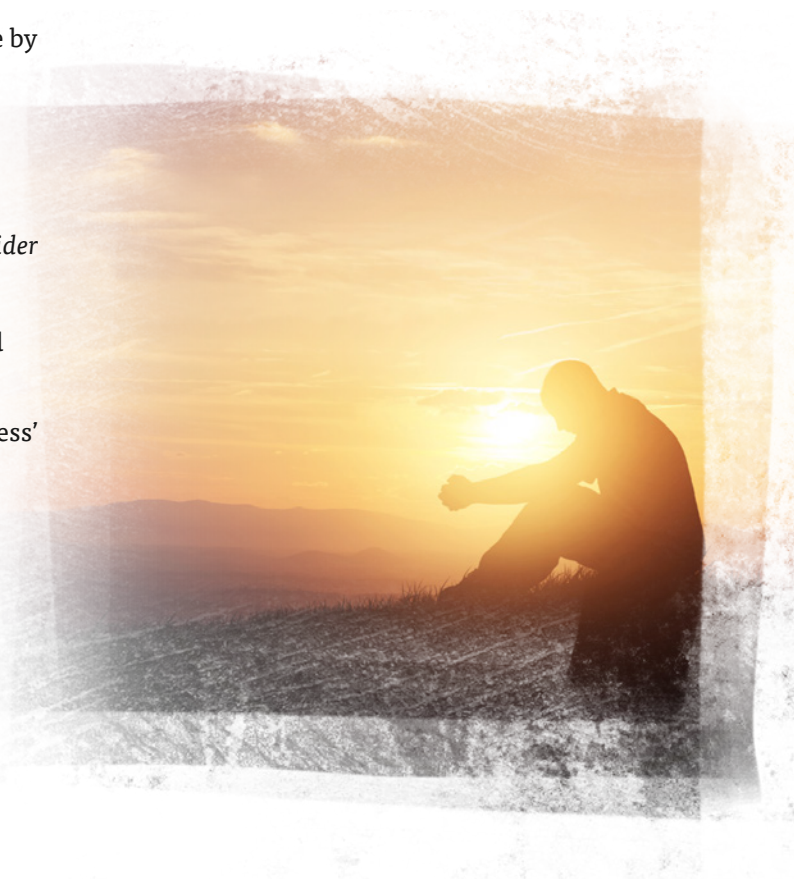
*As a group, each take a phrase of Pope Francis and consider the words...*

1. How is hospitality related to human dignity and respect for persons?
2. In our community, how is 'middle class saintliness' established through perseverance, patience, meekness, joy, a sense of humour, boldness, passion and prayer?

## Closing Prayer

As the fever of day calms towards twilight  
May all that is strained in us come to ease.  
We pray for all who suffered violence today,  
May an unexpected serenity surprise them.  
For those who risk their lives each day for peace,  
May their hearts glimpse providence at the heart of history.  
That those who make riches from violence and war  
Might hear in their dreams the cries of the lost.  
That we might see through our fear of each other  
A new vision to heal our fatal attraction to aggression.  
That those who enjoy the privilege of peace  
Might not forget their tormented brothers and sisters.  
That the wolf might lie down with the lamb,  
That our swords be beaten into ploughshares  
And no hurt or harm be done  
Anywhere along the holy mountain.

*(John O'Donohue, Benedictus)*





## Useful Resources

Baker, Dilly. *A Place at the Table: Liturgies and Resources for Christ-Centred Hospitality*. London: Canterbury Press, 2008.

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Consedine, Raphael. *Fire on the Earth*. Vic: Congregation of Presentation Sisters, 1988.

Gittins, Anthony J. *Called to be Sent: Co-Missioned as Disciples Today*. Ligouri, Missouri: Ligouri Publications, 2008.

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