

**The Bottomless Cup of Christian Hospitality**  
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Normally I like to begin a presentation by getting to know my audience and finding some common ground. Since you are all here by your own free will, I assume many of you are morning people. May I have a show of hands from all who consider themselves a morning person? Now I know something about you. I can assure you that on at least one account, you and I have one thing NOT in common. I agree with Jean-Paul Sartre who said: Hell is other people at breakfast. I am not a morning person! When I saw that I was scheduled to speak at 8:30am on Monday morning—and Canadian Thanksgiving no less—I chose to believe it was not due to the sadism of the ICSC scheduling committee but rather on account of the perceived theme of this presentation. I hope you had a chance to pick up your morning coffee, tea, or protein shake because this presentation does not come with free coffee and in fact, an alternate title I had in mind was "Hospitality: More than coffee Sunday".

My objective this morning is not to give you a list of best practices for hospitality as though I knew what would work in your parish. We represent a vast array of communities and cultures and personalities. An authentic expression of hospitality in your parish must reflect who you are as a community and not a generic recipe for hospitable behaviour. What we all do have in common though is a responsibility to Christian discipleship. Instead of talking about how to do hospitality, I want us to think about what it means to be hospitable. Doing is not exactly the same thing as being. You could inhospitably pour a cup of cold stale coffee out of obligation and plunk it on the table in front of someone with a sneer. But if your being is hospitable, if you have a disposition of hospitality, you will welcome the interruption as a gift, take time to make a fresh pot of coffee, and serve it with a smile and an invitation for conversation. The practice is the same. The disposition and the result are quite different. Best practices flow out of a properly oriented disposition of hospitality. As I offer some reflections on a theology of Christian hospitality, I'd like you to think about how this theology can take on flesh in your own parish.

In her book *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers*, Elizabeth Newman contrasts Christian hospitality to what she calls "sentimental hospitality". I think it is a poignant description given our contemporary image of hospitality. 1. We use the word "hospitality" in conjunction with the word "industry", to describe the network of restaurants, hotels, spas, resorts, cruises, all of which do more than meet basic needs for food, shelter, and transportation for travellers. 2. In our personal lives hospitality often means hosting friends and family members for a meal or to stay for a few days in our home. We usually extend this hospitality at holiday times such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter, times when we have a few days off from work, and when we can prepare by cleaning the house, polishing the silverware, and cooking lavish feasts. 3. We also use the word a lot in our Catholic communities. Many communities have ministry descriptions that include a page for 'hospitality ministers'. Descriptions include any of the following: greeting people as they arrive for and depart from liturgies, teams who contact newly registered parishioners, and of course those who make and serve coffee at parish gatherings.

These images of hospitality: the hospitality industry, domestic settings with family and friends, and coffee after mass have shaped our understanding of hospitality. All of these expressions of hospitality are good but we have to understand what values they really reflect. Successful hotels do not make their fortune because they simply offer a safe and warm place for travellers to spend the night. Instead they include large beds with fancy linens, room service, swimming pools, casinos, and spa treatments. Our domestic hosting involves invitations to people we know, family, friends, or co-workers, it is exceptional and something for which we plan well in advance. And at church, we identify a particular group of individuals whom we say have the gift of hospitality and these people pour coffee and bring baked sweets according to a pre-arranged schedule for those who know enough people that they want to linger and chat with their friends.

Based on these contemporary images, we would have to define hospitality as entertainment, as an extra we add on if and when we have the time, as something we extend to people like us, friends, families, people already part of our community.

Christian hospitality is much more than entertainment, than something we do when we have the time or when our name is scheduled. Today the term has lost something of its moral dimension and most Christians have lost the rich and complex tradition of hospitality.

In this presentation, we will explore hospitality as a significant Christian practice by offering an historical, theological, and moral framework for understanding the spiritual obligation to practice hospitality. Hospitality is much more than coffee Sunday. It's much more than greeting people at the door. And it's not just for those who sign up to be hospitality ministers. Every member of your parish, every Christian, must be a hospitality minister. The U.S. Bishop's Pastoral letter on stewardship begins with the quotation: Once one chooses to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, stewardship is not an option. Similarly, if you say you are a steward, you must practice hospitality. A stewardship parish, forms a community of people who understand and offer Christian hospitality: every person, every day, and everywhere.

For this presentation, I relied on Christine Pohl's Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition for most of the quotations and would direct you to this book for a more detailed discussion of some of the concepts as well as to the corresponding study guide which includes summaries, discussion questions, and activities for parish groups.

#### Road Map

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## **I Introduction**

The earliest understanding of hospitality was to offer welcome to strangers. Who is a stranger? The word stranger comes from the Latin *extraneus*, meaning from the outside. So, a stranger is someone who comes into our circle from the outside. But one does not have to be in a foreign country to be a stranger. Being on the outside simply implies a disconnection from some kind of relationships. This disconnection could be from the family, church, economy, or the civic community. Strangers are vulnerable due to this disconnection or lack of network of support and belonging.

Most of us have resources: material, emotional, spiritual, and relational resources such that we may not think of ourselves as vulnerable strangers. Also, our society is individualistic—any suggestion that we might be dependent on others is generally seen as derogatory. In ancient times, people were not so independent. All travellers, for example, depended on hospitality from individuals in order to have a place to stay and food to eat. Nevertheless, apart from having basic needs met, we all know the joy in being warmly welcomed as well as the pain of being excluded and feeling on the margins.

I want you to ask yourselves, who are the strangers in your parish community? Obvious strangers are newcomers to the city or parish, even more vulnerable if they have language or cultural barriers, insecurities with job or home. Less obvious strangers are people with addictions, mental illness, or criminal histories looking to God and the Christian community for support and direction.

One category of stranger we often overlook includes people whose family identity has shifted. I'm referring here to people who have experienced divorce. Recently I learned of a person in my own parish who has found it difficult to attend church as a newly divorced father of 3. The family used to attend church together but now that the family is broken, this man feels very "strange" coming to church by himself. In addition to the strangeness of the experience of sitting alone for the first time in 20 years, he feels really conspicuous, wonders if people are whispering about the situation, and then there are those who don't know about the divorce and innocently ask where his wife is that day. People grieving are in a similar situation in that the person going through the experience has to renegotiate his or her sense of self and relationship to others.

While we must be on the look out for the obvious stranger, I do want to draw our attention also to this hidden stranger who might be sitting right next to you at mass, might be with you every month at your parish council meeting, or singing with you in the choir. You all know the phrase: charity starts at home? Extending true hospitality to the stranger on the inside is what makes us a loving community and it is what strangers from outside will sense even if the coffee pot is dry.

## **II Ancient World**

### **i) Israel**

Let us look at the overarching narrative of Israel's history to set a context for hospitality. Remember that God called Abraham away from family and from a familiar land to be a

stranger in a foreign land. God promised Abraham offspring and land but warned that these descendants would wander in a land not theirs as strangers oppressed for 400 years.

(Genesis 15:5-21). Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years, 15:13)

After their exile in Egypt, when Israel inherited the promised land, God reminded them that the land belonged to the Lord and that they were aliens in their own land. God owns the land and they are the caretakers, living in it only by God's permission and grace.

(Leviticus 25:23) –for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.

The Israelites' identity as a chosen but alien people served as a constant reminder of their dependence on God and the requirement that they respond with faithfulness, gratitude, and obedience. Moreover, their situation fostered empathy towards the vulnerable strangers who came to them for hospitality.

(Exodus 23:9) You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Israel.

## ii) Pagan

The Greek and Roman notion of hospitality was different. It stressed formal reciprocal obligations between the benefactor and the recipient. The focus of this tradition was on the suitability and worthiness of the recipient rather than on need. The relationship was calculated to benefit the benefactor. You could call it "ambitious hospitality" since it was offered for the advantage of the host. We have another word for this kind of hospitality, used especially in terms of getting ahead in business. Any guesses? Networking or schmoozing.

The difference between schmoozing and Christian hospitality with its roots in the tradition of Israel, is that Christian hospitality offers welcome to those who appear to bring less to the encounter rather than more.

## iii) Early Christian

Early Christian writers had to struggle against the ambitious hospitality of their time and attempted to integrate the hospitality God offered to Israel with the example of Jesus Christ.

Lactantius, sometimes known as the Christian Cicero, wrote in the third century about Christian topics in the learned style of the educated pagan. He referred to the notion of strangers and framed hospitality as a question of justice.

It is easy to do good to family, neighbours, and friends. But in what does the nature of justice consist than in our affording to strangers through kindness, that which we render to our own relatives through affection.

Listening to St. Jerome, who wrote in the fourth century, we can presume that the clergy were trying to assure their own advancement by welcoming the rich and powerful to their table. Jerome writes to them, urging them instead to depend on Christ for their future.

Let the poor and strangers be acquainted with your modest table and with them Christ shall be your guest.

Compared to the pagan approach where hospitality is offered based on the potential for benefit to the host, welcoming those who do not appear to bring any benefit, may seem costly. But, as St. John Chrysostom explained also in the fourth century, it makes sense in the economy of God.

You receive Me into your lodging, I will receive you into the kingdom of My Father; you took away My hunger, I take away your sins; . . . you saw Me a stranger, I make you a citizen of heaven, you gave Me bread, I give you an entire Kingdom, that you may inherit and possess it.

### III Biblical World

#### i) Hebrew Scriptures

In the Hebrew Scriptures, there are many stories that could help us to discern the shape of hospitality.

Elijah and the Widow of Zaraphath (1 Kings 17)  
Elisha and the Shunammite Woman (2 Kings 4:8-37).  
The Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:1-22)  
The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19)

#### Elijah and the Widow of Zaraphath

- Elijah seeks hospitality
- The widow claims that she and her son will starve as they only have enough food for one more meal.
- Elijah promises her that God will provide for them until the end of the drought if she shares.
- The woman shares with him and God, through Elijah provides food and ultimately restores her son to life after he dies.

#### Elisha and the wealthy Shunammite Woman

- The shunammite woman recognizes Elisha as a prophet so she prepares a chamber for him to use whenever he would come to Shunem.
- Elisha promises her that she will bear a son.
- Later, Elisha brings this son back from the dead.

#### Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah

- Story well-known iconographically in the Trinity icon of Rublev.
- In the heat of the day, Abraham was sitting near the entrance of his tent when three visitors arrived. Abraham ran out to greet them with honour and deference. Then he offered

them water to wash off the dust from their journey and an opportunity to rest under the tree. While the three visitors refreshed themselves, Abraham instructed his wife Sarah to bake some bread for them while he selected a calf and gave it to his servant to prepare. Abraham brought the meal out to them and stood by them while they ate.

- Before the three strangers leave, they predict that Sarah will bear a son in her old age and as Abraham escorts them on their way they warn him of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- In the context of hospitality, gradually Abraham realises that the visitors are angels bringing a message from the Lord.

#### The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

- In the story that follows the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah, the three angels receive a similar welcome from Lot. However, the men of the town come to Lot's home and demand he turn the guests over for sexual exploitation. Lot tried to negotiate with them and in order to protect the guests – shockingly he offered his own daughters in exchange.
- Then, in this context of this hospitality gone wrong, the angels reveal their true nature by rescuing Lot and his daughters from the men of the town and saving his family from the destruction of Sodom.

In all these examples, hospitality is connected with the gradual revelation of God's presence, with a message of promise, and with blessing. The example of Lot indicates that hospitality can be dangerous when it challenges the existing practice of a community.

Sometimes Christians feel badly that they are afraid to offer hospitality by bringing strangers into their homes. However, if we look more closely at the shape of hospitality described by the hospitality of Abraham and Sarah in particular, we will find some clues as to how we can temper the fear that comes along with offering hospitality to strangers. We must take notice that Abraham did not bring the strangers into his tent. Rather, he ran out to meet them. In Biblical times, the interaction with strangers always began in a public space like at the city gate. Similarly, the food is usually brought out to the stranger. The nature of the household was also different from today. We tend to live in isolated communities of the nuclear family. Abraham's household included not only him and his wife, but also included servants and presumably other relations. As we saw, everyone in town knew that Lot was offering hospitality to the strangers. So, the strangers are welcomed into a larger community. The risk of strangers doing harm is minimised when everyone knows about their presence. The cost to the one offering hospitality is minimal, as with the widow, and, with the exception of Elisha, the stay is brief. In all these stories the guest brings the host into contact with the presence of God which is confirmed by a form of material blessing.

We can summarize the shape of hospitality as follows:

1. Meet the stranger in a public space
2. Invite the stranger into one's household/community
3. Refresh and protect the stranger
4. Gradual revelation of God's presence in the stranger
5. Promise of a concrete blessing

Perhaps you have your own stories of meagre resources proving sufficient or of finding yourself unprepared when suddenly someone shows up with exactly what you need. According to St. Gregory the Great, angels refer to a function not a nature. Angels are those who bring to us messages from God. Even today God is present to us through angels but it is up to us to open our eyes and identify God. We have to see through the disguise to recognise God's blessing. When I first moved to Calgary, in my imagination I had a good idea of the kinds of people I wanted to meet and communities with which I wanted to become involved. After six months I was frustrated that I didn't seem to be making any friends and couldn't find what I was looking for. It took some time, some humility, and some courage on my part to realise that God did send me friends and communities but in packages that I did not expect. It was up to me to welcome these people into my life.

## ii) New Testament

The New Testament recalls this shape of hospitality when we read in Hebrews:

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

As needy strangers were really angels in disguise, in the Hebrew Scriptures these same elements of mystery and surprise are used in New Testament hospitality: beggars are really Jesus, few resources prove sufficient, and the sharing of meagre resources results in abundance. Jesus also sets an example of hospitality to strangers.

Think for a moment about who will be your neighbours at the Thanksgiving table. Usually we spend these holidays with family and sometimes with friends. Doing so, solidifies relationships that already exist and reinforces established social boundaries. Many people alternate hosting the meal with relatives or friends, others divide up the dishes among the guests, like a potluck. To ensure that no one person does or pays too much, there is an understanding that the host will be repaid by an invitation to be a guest the next time around. Jesus sets a different example:

When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. (Luke 14:12-14)

If we invite people on the margins, there is no immediate benefit. However, the gesture anticipates God's kingdom and promises repayment at the resurrection.

In general we are drawn instinctively to invite people who are good conversationalists, the people who make us feel comfortable, who aren't too much trouble. Including the people we least desire, with their inconvenient needs, conditions, and inability to reciprocate, anticipates and reflects God's welcome to us.

One of the most important parables for the entire tradition of Christian hospitality is that of the sheep and the goats. The sheep ask when it was that they saw Jesus hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick and imprisoned. Jesus answers 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.' Matthew 25:30-46

This parable tells us that when we care for the poor, we care for Jesus. Moreover, there is an explicit link between Christian hospitality in this life and God's invitation into the Kingdom. As we see from Jesus' response to the goats, who did not offer hospitality, those who do welcome strangers welcome Jesus himself and they themselves are welcomed into the Kingdom.

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.' . . . And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

St. John Chrysostom explains very clearly this relationships between Christ and the poor.

By how much the brother [or sister] may be least, so much the more does Christ come to you through him [her].

#### **IV Respect and Dignity**

What are the implications of seeing Jesus in other people? We all have moments of being star struck, when we want to show our respect and admiration for a person of influence. For me it occurred last August when I met the Master General of the Dominican Order. Although he was introduced to me as such and by name, I never imagined I would meet "The" Master General outside the elevator where I work in Calgary so, I chatted casually with him as though he were any run-of-the-mill Dominican. It wasn't until later that the light bulb went off and I was star struck. At that point, I was grateful for my ignorance because surely I would've been tongue-tied had I realised that I was speaking with someone whose position I admire. It is human nature to do something special or try to impress someone we deem to be important. Similarly, we may not go out of our way for someone of little influence. If we were to see every person as Jesus, however, we would be less inclined to consider one person as more important than another. Seeing Jesus in another person helps us learn to recognise that God is already at work in his or her life. It teaches us to be more sensitive to the gifts that each person brings and to hear what God is saying or doing through another person.

Hospitality is commonly understood as making people feel at home. Unfortunately, many hosts mistakenly try to cultivate this experience by fussing over aesthetics and waiting on the guests. Think for a moment about the difference between a place you visit and a place you belong. Consider a small child who might have dinner with a friend's family. What is the difference between dinner at home among adults who love and care for the child and dinner among the loving and caring parents of a friend? What does the child have to do at home

that the child doesn't have to do at the friend's place? At home, the child usually has to perform chores following the meal. Similarly for adults, home is a place where you have responsibility. Respecting a guest involves not only offering service but also recognising what the guest has to offer and inviting that person to contribute to the community. This principle has significant implications for parish life. How often have you attended a meeting where the committee is brainstorming what the parish can offer for youth, for young adults, for seniors? To build up a parish family, we do not so much want to offer another service to compete with all the other forms of entertainment available—let's get serious, not many of our parishes can compare with secular offerings like music videos, motion pictures, and even the Lyric Opera when it comes to pure entertainment. The point, of course, is that we aren't here to entertain. What we can offer is a place at the table of the Lord, which includes offering people an opportunity to take responsibility in the community.

In his encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, Pope Benedict challenges us to see as the work of charity (and by extension hospitality) not only material support but also the refreshment and care of people's souls. The latter is even more necessary. Merely meeting the material needs of people dehumanizes them. It masks what the Pope calls a materialist conception of humanity, and disregards all that is specifically human. It does not respect the dignity of the person in need.

Recently I heard a homily where the priest recalled witnessing a group at his parish preparing lunches for homeless families who participate in their Inn From the Cold programme. He could not help but notice that when they went out to shop for supplies, they did not buy the cheapest food—whatever was on sale or at the clearance counter. Instead, they picked up food that was healthy and of good quality, as if they were buying it for their own families. And so, when the time came to prepare the food, you would not have known that they were preparing lunches for strangers. It felt like they were feeding their own families at home.

St. John Chrysostom agrees and advocates showing excessive joy when offering hospitality in order to avoid shaming the person receiving.

The stranger requires much attendance, much encouragement, and with all this it is difficult for him not to feel abashed; for so delicate is his position that while he receives the favour, he is ashamed. That shame we ought to remove by the most attentive service, and to show by words and actions, that we do not think we are conferring a favour, but receiving one, that we are obliging less than we are obliged.
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We must be aware as much of what we receive from those we serve as of what we give. In giving hospitality, the host is both obliged and blessed. Serving others is an opportunity for which the host should be grateful and one which hosts should offer to others.

In the person of Jesus, we see clearly this intermingling of the roles of host and guest. Jesus as gracious host welcomes the unwanted. Jesus as vulnerable guest began life as a homeless infant and child refugee before becoming an adult with no place to lay his head and finally a despised convict. Jesus both welcomes and needs welcome. Similarly, the disciples provided hospitality and depended on the hospitality of others.

The first step to good stewardship is receiving. One cannot only give love, one must receive love also. To offer hospitality, you must be humble enough to receive it. It is often easier to give than to receive. But if you are only ever a host, you reinforce patterns of status, wealth, power, and resources. You may even become a host in someone else's home, disempowering those who receive from you passively. I recall an example from friends who went to El Salvador to study Spanish. They resided in the one-room home of a family of four. The family put up a curtain so my friends could have privacy, gave them food, and showed them around the town. It was very difficult for my friends to receive hospitality in this way because they knew that compared to them, the family was very poor. However, they also recognised that to refuse what the family wanted to offer would be an insult. Allan Boesak, a South African theologian wrote:

The pinnacle of lovelessness is not our unwillingness to be a neighbour to someone, but our unwillingness to allow them to be a neighbour to us.

Contrary to what we might think, it is usually easier to give than it is to receive. Receiving from others can be difficult and humbling. When we don't receive, we often say it is out of politeness or that we don't want to inconvenience another. Without knowing it, we are being selfish because we often prefer to do for ourselves so we are not obligated to or in relationship with another person. Consider times when you have been hesitant to receive a gift from someone else. What was at stake in receiving?

The philosopher Jacques Derrida understood this very human perspective on giving and receiving. He makes a pun using the German word for poison, which is Gift. Derrida says that gifts are poison because they create a relationship of debt, obligations, inferiority, and superiority. I would suggest that another way to look at it is to say that receiving puts us in relationship with the giver. The economy of giving, much like the economy of love, is mutual and interdependent. When we receive, we simultaneously give someone else an opportunity to give.

## **V Hospitality and Eucharist**

In the context of stewardship I often speak about how we live in a culture of want where commercialism bombards us with the message that what we have is not enough and who we are is not good enough. Our unwillingness to receive only contributes to this pervasive sense that we are lacking. Yet, at the eucharistic table we are invited to participate in the abundance of trinitarian giving and receiving. The subtitle of Elizabeth Newman's book *Untamed Hospitality* is "Welcoming God and Other Strangers". She demonstrates how the way we welcome God into our lives determines how we show hospitality to others.

The eucharist offers us a way of participating in the giving and receiving of love between the Persons of the Trinity. Worship itself is hospitality because through worship, we learn to be both guests and hosts in the kingdom of God. Elizabeth Newman explains:

[In the liturgy] we receive more fully the truth of whose we are as we offer in return our prayers and thanksgiving, indeed our very lives, to God. Such hospitality is not an individual or even a communal achievement. It is rather a gift to be received, and its faithful reception

makes us part of something larger than ourselves: Christ's own body, a body marked by God's triune giving and receiving." (p. 17)

In contrast to the culture of want, our participation in the triune life of God shows us how to live out of the abundance that God offers. God's triune hospitality calls us away from our comfort zone where we control our self-image, our idols, that is, our attitude towards money, success, possessions, ambitions, and the consequent behaviour. Instead, God's triune hospitality directs us to a place where what we do is determined by God's giving rather than our grasp of the way things are.

In the miracle of the loaves and fishes, the disciples see only the scarcity of five loaves and two fish. According to their perception, it would be best to send the hungry crowd away. Yet, when all are willing to receive from Jesus, God provides enough food for all five thousand gathered. How much more generous could we be if our actions were determined by God's giving rather than our own perceptions!

In this divine hospitality of the eucharist, Jesus is not only the host but he is also the meal itself. Through baptism into Jesus Christ, disciples receive the living water. In his body and blood offered upon the Cross, Jesus is the living bread. In the eucharist Christ's costly welcome to us facilitates our offering of praise and thanksgiving for the reconciliation won through his hospitality.

The post-resurrection encounter of Jesus with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus shows how Jesus is made present in the breaking of the bread. Appearing first as a stranger, Jesus is welcomed by the disciples and invited for a meal, during the course of which he becomes the host.

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. (Luke 24:30-31)

When I was speaking about hospitality recently at a parish in Calgary, one of the parishioners, Pat, the stewardship committee chair, mentioned that on Sunday morning she often feels uncomfortable coming to church. She feels that people expect her to be friendly but she is shy and would just as soon enter unrecognised to participate in the liturgy. Yet, after the celebration of the eucharist, she finds she has little problem socialising. I might chalk this feeling up to not being a morning person but in reality, I think there is more at stake in the analysis. For one thing, Pat used the word "friendly". As I hope you will have come to agree after this presentation, hospitality is not about being "nice" or "friendly". We don't have to be bubbly and cheerful to offer Christian hospitality. In fact, hospitality may look more like "tough love" sometimes. This is not to say we should cease being friendly, just that friendliness is not necessarily indicative of hospitality and a lack of friendliness does not preclude genuine hospitality.

Perhaps more significant than the friendliness issue, is the question of timing. Many people use the time before eucharist to prepare themselves to participate in the divine giving and receiving. Triune hospitality is not always second nature for us and we have to make space

in our hearts and minds to welcome the Word of God proclaimed and sacrificed. Afterwards we are nourished by Jesus, the meal. We have been drawn together as one body through worship. Through Jesus, others are no longer strangers to us. By our participation in the eucharist we open ourselves to the stranger. We prepare ourselves not to give a perfunctory smile but to deeply open our hearts to know other people to take on the vulnerability of humbly receiving another person.

Earlier I asked you to reflect upon the people who will sit with you at Thanksgiving. Most of the time we eat with people who are like us, whether at the dinner table or even at our parish church. Jesus and his disciples were scorned for eating with people unlike them—tax collectors, prostitutes, Gentiles, and others who were on the margins. Why do you suppose eating together was so subversive? Meal sharing, like eucharist, is a great equalizer. We all have to eat and drink. Sharing a meal reduces us all to what we have in common, ultimately breaking down the barriers that separate us from one another. In this way, shared meals are not only the most basic expression of hospitality but they are equally the reality of God's kingdom as recalled and made present at the table of the eucharist.

About eight years ago, I was given a perspective on Catholic worship that profoundly altered my own understanding of hospitality. I was completing an internship in hospital chaplaincy, a unit of CPE. The resident chaplain, Marcel, was a music minister in the Baptist church. The members of our group took turns leading worship every morning. I was the only Catholic in the group and I prepared morning prayer from the liturgy of the hours, which was very different from the free-form praise worship that Marcel prepared. One day, Marcel shared with me that he really admired Catholic worship for one reason especially. He said that in his tradition he sometimes found it very difficult to go to church if he felt sinful, angry, or sad because the music is always lively and the focus always on praise. Indeed, the Gospel is always Good News but it seems Marcel's community was confusing happiness and superficial friendliness for joy and hospitality. Catholics are drawn to worship as much to be healed from our sins as to give thanks for our redemption, to give voice to our anger as much as to offer praise, and to lament no less than to rejoice. We are a broken people and what good is our hospitality if we only welcome those who are in a position to return our superficial smiles and greetings?

Before moving on to the conclusion, I'll share with you one final story of hospitality and stewardship that is particularly close to my own heart.

In 2002 I moved from Chicago back to Notre Dame to begin writing my dissertation. 6 months later, my dad passed away unexpectedly. He and I were very close. I had never experienced loss before and due to my particular family circumstances found myself without any emotional support at all. I was incapacitated by grief. It took a couple weeks before I returned to church and when I did, it was all I could do to show up. I could neither sing, nor respond verbally, nor pray. One day attending mass on campus, I felt alienated by our resident liturgist who proclaimed that for the Lord's Prayer we should assume the superior orans position because it expresses our openness to God. I felt betrayed and was anything but open to God. For me, the orans position would've been a lie so I kept my hands firmly by my side and felt most unwelcome at that liturgy. Although I was now living in Indiana, my parish was still Gregory the Great in Andersonville. For Holy Week, I planned to spend the

week in Chicago so I could be at my parish. The church had suffered a fire so we were in a bingo hall, which wasn't exactly beautiful. But there, in that hall, I received my crash course in stewardship.

The morning of Holy Thursday, a friend and I were chosen to be among the people who would have their feet washed. We agreed. The hall was set up with antiphonal seating and those to be washed took their seats facing one another in the front before mass began. As I sat, waiting for the beginning, I became increasingly agitated. I didn't know why but I did not want to be there, I did not want my feet washed. When Jesus expresses his intention to wash the feet of the disciples, Peter protests and Jesus answers him, Unless I wash you, you will have no share in me. Despite my agitation, I stayed in my seat. That morning I had my ultra long hair shorn ultra short. When Fr. Brian came to my spot to wash my feet he looked up, and in a surprised whisper he exclaimed: You cut your hair! It was a very human moment. Some of you, who know Fr. Brian, know that he is a liturgist and very beautiful and reverent preside but he was not so caught up in the ritual that he failed to recognise me. Like Peter, I did not want the Master to wash my feet. Peter's protest was out of reverence. Mine out of distrust. But for both of us, it was in receiving service, that we were formed for service.

The next day, Good Friday, all I could do was weep silently through the liturgy. It wasn't much different from how I'd spent every Sunday for the previous three months. But this day, I especially identified Jesus' suffering with my dad's suffering. Then, on the heels of my experience of the mandatum on Holy Thursday, it dawned on me. Many people have suffered much greater injustice than I was experiencing. How often I had heard people say they couldn't cry out of fear that once they started they would never stop. Or how many people have too many responsibilities with family and work to allow themselves to grieve. I had no shortage of tears and so I consciously offered my tears that day and many days subsequently for those whose pain was too great for them to weep.

As we strive to be Christian stewards, we have to remember that everybody has something to give. The community of St. Gregory's ministered to me by allowing me to give what I had. Those days I needed their voices to sing God's praise and offer thanksgiving because I was mute. Since Vatican II, we've often adopted this notion that participation means everybody has to be making noise. Listening is participation too. We participate spiritually when we receive the ministry and the prayers of others. In one chapter of her book *Amazing Grace*, Kathleen Norris poses the question why we go to church. Her answer is somebody needs you there. I believe that at St. Gregory's in 2003 somebody needed me to cry, to listen, and to receive their prayers as much as I needed them to pray for me.

## **V Conclusion**

I began today by articulating the difference between doing and being. The difference between the two rests upon images. Contemporary images of hospitality lead to an attitude of hospitality as entertainment and a shallow practice of friendliness and service for a fee.

Christian hospitality has a different set of images that require us to recognise the stranger in our midst and to identify with Christ in order to reach out and draw the stranger into our community. An attitude of Christian hospitality accepts the economy of God so that we give

without expecting anything in return. This economy is founded upon the humility of receiving from others and from God and thereby giving others an opportunity to give.

The behaviour that follows from these images and attitudes is therefore not a scheduled hospitality but an inward disposition that must be cultivated individually in your hearts and collectively in your community.

In practice, the process of developing a hospitable disposition is counter-cultural. The two challenges that strike me as especially pressing are individualism and time.

As we've seen, to be hospitable we must be in relationship with God and with one another. The challenge is that we are a mobile and individualistic society with disturbingly high levels of loneliness, alienation, and estrangement. People are yearning for relationships, identity, and meaning. The Pastoral Letter on stewardship explains that disciples have to be stewards of each other's callings because people do not hear the Lord's call in isolation from one another. We are hospitable when we see the presence of Jesus in one another, which then helps us to recognise the gifts of the other and to call them forth. Hospitality is not competitive but requires humility. To be truly welcomed, one does not really want a cup of coffee, one wants to be seen, recognized, and known. The ritual may involve coffee or a meal but first and foremost it involves our time and attention, a listening ear, and a discerning heart. Once we know another person, we can welcome that person and find and offer a place to that person in our community.

Finally, we all deal with the reality that people are busy. In today's world, we celebrate the capacity to multitask and people often seem to take pride in being busy. Yet, the most valuable thing a person has to give is time. To give someone else our full attention means we view that person as a human being rather than an embodied need or an interruption. Many of us are task-oriented and we want to schedule our hospitality; we want to be efficient. Stewardship calls us to re-think how we respond to unexpected or inconvenient guests who may come at inopportune times.

When you invite the people of your parish to be good stewards they will often respond with overburdened exasperation asking how they can possibly add stewardship and hospitality to their already impossible agendas. It is here that the rubber hits the road and we have to mean it when we say that hospitality is not an add-on. It's not about one event or one smile. We cannot just be welcoming when we are handing out bulletins at the door. Instead, we must extend hospitality in the pew, in the parking lot, in our families, at the workplace, on the street, and in our life of prayer. To be hospitable Christians we have to intentionally nurture a commitment to cultivating a disposition of hospitality within ourselves. And we will learn to be hospitable in small increments of daily faithfulness.

We have some time for your comments and questions. It would be especially helpful to hear how this theological reflection of hospitality resonates with your own experience in the parish, where it challenges your current practice, and where it might fall short.