

Call to Worship – 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time – July 16/17, 2016

Summer is the time which offers so many opportunities for hospitality. We might, on the spur of the moment, phone a friend, pack a simple salad lunch, and go to the lake for a quiet picnic, complete with breezy shade and the sound of water. Or we might receive an invitation to a family barbecue, -dozens of people, great grilled food, music in the background and lively conversation over it. Sometimes we entertain folks who have come from a distance to spend time with us, and we relish the opportunity to be with them, even when we have to scramble the usual arrangements of sleeping space and chairs at the table. Two of the readings today give us vignettes of hospitality.

The Book of Genesis records Abram's hospitable welcome to passing strangers. This was the way of it. Dozing at the entrance to his tent, Abram became aware of three figures approaching, apparently planning to pass by. Abram accosted them, offered them refreshment, and prevailed upon them to remain for a meal. When they agreed, Abram pulled out all the stops; Sarah would make bread with the best flour, he would choose the best meat from his flock, he would serve them himself. After the meal, as they prepared to leave, one of the strangers promised a gift to their generous host: in a year, Abram would have a son of his own.

Martha, in today's narrative from Luke's gospel, shows every indication of trying to outdo Abram, but at the cost of her disposition. If she plans to go over the top, demonstrating all her culinary skills and observing all the traditional prescriptions for a hostess, she will need her sister Mary's help, and that is not forthcoming. Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus, offering her hospitality by listening to his word. The point, really, as Jesus clearly but gently indicates to Martha, is that the guest is the one central to any hospitality. The guest may be Jesus, in which case listening to his word is appropriate, but there is no doubt that Jesus intends it to apply to any guest.

And what comes from this approach? Whenever we are faced with the opportunity to offer hospitality, there is always as there was with Abram a gift in return; grace accompanies every guest.