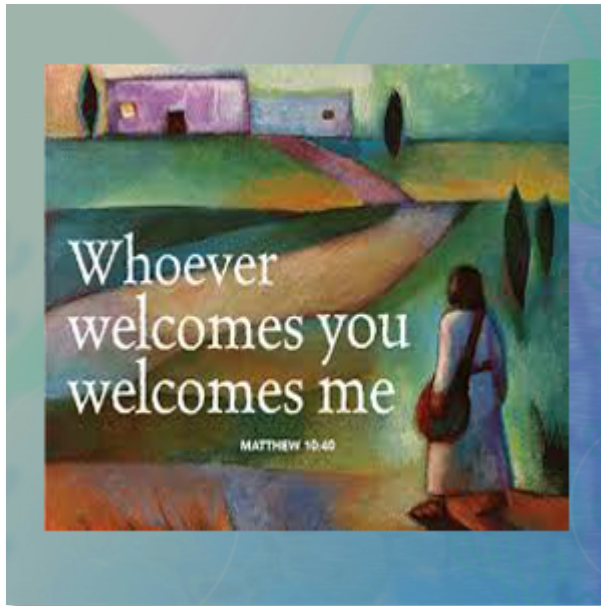


Homily for Sunday, July 2, 2023



Like I mentioned last weekend, in Matthew's gospel, there is the famous Sermon on the Mount, that is followed up with a lesser-known sermon called the Missioning Sermon. Last week and this week's gospel are about the Missioning Sermon, how Jesus is sending his followers out into the world to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is breaking into the world here and now. Jesus isn't trying to hone skills within his disciples before unleashing them on the world. He is trying to shape their attitudes and foster a sense of conviction in them.

One of the attitudes he's trying to develop in them is the attitude of hospitality. Hospitality is more than being a church or a Walmart greeter, although it's great to be welcomed anywhere we go. It just makes me feel like I've been noticed and that my presence matters to someone else. I remember growing up back in Aylmer, Quebec and the newly ordained priest we got, a Cape Bretoner, knew my name and the names of my seven siblings within a month of his arrival. He would call each of us by name as we entered the church. He seemed to know something most of my uncles, aunts and parents often messed up royally—our names!

Hospitality is a big theme in the Bible. People who lived during those times felt that at any moment they could be entertaining God or angels sent from heaven! That is a very Biblical attitude for Jesus himself told us that, "Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, even in the simple offering a cup of cold water, you do it to me." I'm beginning to appreciate that cultural attitude of welcoming with the many new parishioners we have who grew up in a Mediterranean country, like Jesus did, or who grew up in an Asian country. Hospitality just seems to flow out of these people effortlessly. I can't seem to go over to their houses for just a coffee. It's usually the red-carpet treatment with food to feed an army. (Keep up the good work!).

Being hospitable, being welcoming, also carries risks that we may or may not want to take. It may not be God or angels in disguise; it may be someone who takes advantage of our kindness or someone who comes to do us harm. Putting yourself out there in the world of hospitality and love is a gamble, for you never know if your hospitality or love will be

appreciated or returned in kind or thrown in your face. You lose, at least some control, the moment you welcome someone into your house or into your life. It feels like a kind of death, like we're not in control of our destiny. It can be akin to someone being buried with Christ in baptism in the hopes that they will also rise with him into newness of life. Maybe that's why hospitality is easier said than done. Maybe that's why following Jesus is easier said than done. Before we welcome someone, we are already weighing the cost of doing so in our minds. That's the risk. The readings today tell us it's the worth the risk. Something good always comes about when we're hospitable toward others.

A woman who lived in Shunem, risked welcoming a stranger into her home; it was the prophet, Elisha. She sensed he was a holy man. And since he passed her house regularly, she felt called to do the hospitable thing—she welcomed the prophet into her home. In fact, she built an addition to her home just for him. The good thing that came about because of her risk-taking was that Elisha left her a blessing and a promise. She was blessed with having a child, a child she never thought she could have. A little bit of dying, a little bit of losing control happened in her so that a whole lot of joy could also happen.

Hospitality is not just about building a granny suite onto our houses as this woman did. It's about creating a space within our own lives for people to enter so that they can flourish. The prophet Elisha flourished because of this woman's hospitality. Little acts of kindness have a rippling effect in the world.

Jesus, like I said, is sending out his disciples into the world. He believes they have something precious to offer others. He also wants his disciples to see themselves as not only givers but also receivers. Jesus hopes they will be welcomed, but there are no guarantees. He also hopes they will welcome others. In other words, just as important as it is to give, it is also important to receive what others want to give you. I'm constantly reminded that the people I am ministering to have a gift for me as well. I could write a book about all the times I've dragged myself to the hospital or to the prison or to the coffee shop to meet someone thinking I would rather be any place but this place. Yet, halfway through the encounter, I feel this is the place I needed to be, and I usually come home on a high. Upon returning home, I realized that the poor, the broken, the depressed, the lonely, had a grace they wanted to share with me and that I almost missed it.

Jesus says, "Whoever welcomes a prophet will have a prophet's reward. Whoever welcomes a righteous person will have the reward of the righteous. Whoever welcomes an apostle will be welcoming him." The focus in today's gospel is not on being an apostle, a prophet, or a righteous person but on welcoming these. And don't forget to welcome the little ones with a simple cup of cold water. That last one is the real graceful moment.

Welcoming an apostle, a prophet or a righteous person is fine, but welcoming a poor person, who cannot return the favour, is truly a graceful moment.

Of course, hospitality usually doesn't materialize without the knowledge that the one we are welcoming is our equal. Once we realize we are all equal in the eyes of God, our outlook begins to change, and hospitality almost becomes second nature. Hospitality for Jesus was second nature. He didn't see saints and sinners; he saw only children of God.

One day, a young fugitive, trying to hide himself from the enemy, entered a small village. The people were kind to him and offered him a place to stay. But when the soldiers who sought the fugitive asked where he was hiding, everyone became fearful. The soldiers threatened to burn the village and kill every person in it, unless the young man was handed over to them before dawn. The young people went to the minister and ask him what to do. The minister, torn between handing the boy over to the enemy or having his people killed, withdrew to his room, and read his Bible hoping to find the answer before dawn. After many hours, in the early morning his eyes fell on these words, "It is better that one man dies than that the whole people be lost." Then the minister closed his Bible, called the soldiers, and told them where the boy was hidden. And after the soldiers led the fugitive away to be killed, there was a feast in the village, because the minister had saved the lives of the people. But the minister did not celebrate. Overcome with deep sadness, he remained in his room. That night an angel came to him and asked, "What have you done?" "I handed over the fugitive to the enemy," he said. "But don't you know you have handed over the Messiah?" "How could I know?" the minister replied anxiously. Then the angel said, "If instead of reading your Bible, you had visited this young man just once and looked into his eyes, you would have known."

Fr. Phil