



13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily

**By the Most Rev Bishop Don Sproxton
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

St Mary's Cathedral Parish House
Sunday 28 June, 2020

One wonderful memory of hospitality I have, is from a trip I had to Ireland in 1989. With a friend of mine, I was travelling from Dublin through Roscommon to Galway. We chose to go on that route because I wanted to call in on a family whose cousins lived in the parish of Wongan Hills.

We arrived at the farm in Roscommon just after lunch and were given a great welcome. The men were laying out the bundles of mown grass for silage, but they dropped everything they were doing to show us around the farm.

After this, we went into the warmth of the house and gathered around the kitchen table to talk about our lives, our visit to Ireland so far, and about the lives and work of their Australian cousins. It was after a three hours that we thought it was time to continue on our drive to Galway and we began thanking them for their time and warm welcome.

They wouldn't hear of us going on and said that we must stay with them for a few days. It was with some reluctance they finally accepted that we had to go on as we had made arrangements to call on another family in a market town further on.

It was that readiness of the family to offer such generous hospitality that has left its mark. This reminded me of hospitality that I and many priests and lay people have received from the St John of God Sisters. The Sisters had a tradition of opening their convent in Subiaco each Monday evening to priests who had no families in Perth for dinner and conversation. Hospitality is the great charism of the Sisters and it seems a lovely characteristic of the Irish.

Hospitality is the theme that runs through the first reading and the Gospel of today's liturgy. It is timely for us to consider its relevance to the Christian today.

We are living in a dehumanised and highly growing urbanised world. There are many forms of division and distinction in our society. There are many walls other than the walls we build in front of our homes! Security is a major concern that has made us resort to alarms and cameras. So when someone opens their home to an outsider, it is quite extraordinary and risky. Yet it is in some ways quite prophetic.

The tradition of the monasteries, stretching back to their beginnings, of offering hospitality has had the power of revitalising their work of Christian witness. The one who receives welcome and comfort can have their identity and worth acknowledged and even restored, as these can be easily lost in our world that tends to reduce us to a number.



Christian hospitality begins by us seeing the person and not a problem. Our propensity to divide, categorise, reduce people to servitude, and slavery, over the centuries, has led to creating so much disadvantage and prejudice against all sorts of people. The wounds remain and are carried by the generations that follow. The recent news and stories of racism has illustrated this.

Our Christian faith urges us to break cycles like this. The Word of God compels us. The pagan woman, entitled and prominent as she was, was moved to offer welcome and comfort to the Hebrew prophet. Her kindness brought Elisha into her home and which was to positively turn her life upside down. The blessing of the prophet revealed that she would have the son she had never been able to conceive.

The community of Matthew learnt what happens when we invite Christ into our homes. Our lives are, as a matter of course, turned upside down. Christ will come in through the outsider, who can be a little one, not just a child, but in the person who carries a problem or issue or challenge to us. The problem they faced was how to accept and live with Christian converts from paganism.

By allowing Christ to come into our heart and communities, we allow him to take the central place. Then the questions come about what and why I think this or that way about a person? Why do I react as I customarily do to this person? Can I believe that I can have a different attitude? Will I ever see that person as Christ, who comes to be the centre of the sanctuary of my heart?

It is certainly risky to allow Christ to enter my home. But enter he must, if we are to share in divine life. St Paul realised that from the moment of his baptism, he had begun living in a new way. He felt as if he had been launched on the road to resurrection and complete restoration as a human. Changes in attitude and therefore action are possible and begin with Christ entering and taking hold of us.

We then see that we begin to imitate service as Christ serves, self-giving like his, and love that is freed of fear and self-concern.

Hospitality is a sign that the divine life is spreading throughout our being. Let it be a clear sign our growing openness to others and of our parishes being welcoming communities of faith.