**THEME**: HOSPITALITY

**READINGS**: Genesis 18: 1-10/ Col. 1: 24-28/ Luke 10:38-42

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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INTRODUCTION

God rewards hospitality or kindness to the stranger (first reading), and when Jesus visits us what He wants is the welcoming heart that is attentive to His word (gospel reading).

KINDNESS IS REWARDED

How often do we overlook our own problems and challenges in order to serve the pressing need of someone else? 24 years had already passed by since God promised Abraham that the wife (Sarah) would bear him a son, and yet there was no sign of the fulfillment of that promise. Besides, he had turned 99 years of age and Sarah 89. Many of us in that situation would have been too depressed to see a stranger passing by, not to talk about being compassionate enough to help him/her.

On the contrary, when Abraham saw those three strangers, he – together with his wife – satisfactorily provided for their needs: a relaxation under a shady tree, the washing of their feet (made dusty by the long walk on the dusty roads), and the serving of food to regain their strength (for the journey ahead).

Incidentally, the strangers were not mere human beings; they were angels sent by God to assure Abraham and Sarah that the promise would soon be fulfilled (a son would be born within a year): ‘welcome strangers into your home. There were some who did that without knowing that they were welcoming angels’ (Heb. 13:2). What a chance Abraham and his wife would have missed if they had not noticed and shown kindness to the strangers! True to God’s word, sent through his stranger-angels, Abraham and Sarah had a child within a year!

These days there are fake or ‘strange’ strangers. But I hope we are not missing the blessings of God that the true or ‘angelic’ strangers bring along, in our bid to avoid the deceptions of the fake ones. As in the story of Abraham and Sarah, hospitality to true strangers is hospitality to angels – messengers of God who bring along the reward of God’s blessings. A true kindness to a genuine stranger opens the gates of heaven for blessings to descend into our lives: the gift of child, the gift of marriage (remember the story of how Rebecca was blessed with the gift of marriage), the gift of a job …and above all the gift of heaven: for Jesus says, ‘Come and possess the kingdom prepared for you …for I was a stranger and you welcomed me’ (Mt. 25:34-35).

WELCOMING JESUS

The above point leads us to pick another lesson from the gospel reading which talks about Jesus’ visit to the home of Martha and Mary. What can we learn from the fact that Jesus was not satisfied with Martha who was busily involved in serving her guests, but was satisfied with Mary who sat down and attentively listened to Jesus? Beloved, unlike the strangers whom Abraham welcomed, when Jesus visits us (in the church) during worship, He does not need the services we render to human strangers. He does not need us to provide a place for Him to ‘relax’ in the church, for the church belongs to Him, being the Head. He does not need the washing of His feet; for He rather washes our feet by forgiving us our sins (*cf*. Jn. 13:1-17). He does not need any food from us, for He rather feeds us with His body and blood.

So what does Jesus need from us when he visits? He wants us to sit down at His feet like Mary and listen attentively to Him. So when He comes as the ***‘Guest Speaker’*** during the readings from Scripture and the homily (preaching), what He wants from us is not our thoughts on what to pray about during the prayer of the faithful, but our absolute attention; what He wants from us is not our thoughts on how much to give during ‘collection’, but our keen interest in His Word; what He wants from the chorister/choirmaster is not the choice of the next song/hymn, but a listening ear; what He wants from the usher is not the ‘Martha syndrome’ of busily serving others, but the ‘Mary spirit’ of sitting down and listening attentively to Him.

Beloved, if we welcome Jesus the ***‘Guest Speaker’*** with a keen listening ear during the proclamation of the Word as well as during the consecration of bread and wine into His body and blood, His graces and other blessings would abound in our lives! Amen!