

Homily of Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

In Genesis 12:3, God promised Abraham, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” As Abraham and Sarah his wife aged, there was no sign of the fulfilment of this promise. Encouraged by Sarah, Abraham’s maid bore Abraham a son called Ishmael. But Ishmael was not the child of the promise.

We read, today, how Abraham and Sarah showed hospitality to three strangers, not knowing that they were angels of the Lord. Abraham and Sarah were rewarded with a gift of Isaac, the child of the promise. God’s promise to Abraham would not have come to fulfilment in the manner it came about if Abraham and Sarah did not show hospitality to the strangers. I believe the Book of Hebrews echoed Abraham’s and Sarah’s encounter where it writes, “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels” (Hebrews 13:1-2).

Two other wonderful examples of the reward of hospitality are as follows. In 1 Kings 17:7-16, the widow of Zarephath, not knowing that Elijah was a prophet, shared with him and her son their “only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug” Her reward was, “There was food every day for Elijah and the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry.” In 2 Kings 4:8-17, the Shunammite woman and her husband who showed hospitality to Elisha and his servant were rewarded. “The woman [who was barren] became pregnant, and gave birth to a son, just as Elisha told her.”

The closing statement of my last Sunday’s homily is, “Somehow, someday, all the love we have given will come back to us.” Jesus promises us, “Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you” (Luke 6:38).

In the Gospel, Jesus visited Mary and Martha. Mary sat beside Jesus and listened to him, while Martha was burdened with much serving, and was anxious and worried about many things. Martha was also upset. It is not surprising that Martha was upset. How won’t someone who is burdened, anxious and worried about many things not be upset with oneself and with everybody?

The Gospel passage teaches us that like Mary, we need to create quality time to commune with God in order to nourish our spiritual life. If we do not do this, there is every possibility that we become like Martha; demands of life burden us, keep us anxious, worried and upset us. There is a saying that the one who is too busy to pray is busier than God wants the person to be. Jesus emphasized the importance of nourishing the spiritual life to his apostles. At some point in their ministering to people Jesus advised them, “‘Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.’ People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat. So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place” (Mark 6:31-33). Spiritual recollection and retreat need to, also, occupy prominent places in our calendar as vacations and various kinds of trips do.

Martha complained to Jesus, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.” Of what use is someone who is hardworking but unhappy and full of complaints? Paul writes in Ephesians 6:7-8, “willingly serving the Lord and not human beings, knowing that each will be requited from the Lord for whatever good he does...” And Colossians 3:23-24, “Whatever you do, do from the heart, as for the Lord and not for others, knowing that you will receive from the Lord the due payment of the inheritance...”

Jesus cautioned Martha, “You are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her,” The one thing chosen by Mary is be close to Jesus. Let us bring all our burdens, anxieties, worries, upsets, and complaints and lay them at the feet of Jesus, and listen to him speak to us. His words are spirit and life (John 6:63). Matthew 11:28, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 6:25 & 27, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, ... Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span?” 1 Peter 5:7, “Cast all your anxieties on him because he cares for you.” Philippians 4:6-7, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP