

on the Feast of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, Companions of our Lord

The Gift of Hospitality

All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say:
I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Matt 25:35)..... *from the rule of St Benedict*

There is a lay community in Devon, now known as Sheldon, but originally called 'The Society of Mary and Martha', and their "patronal festival" is on this day. It is a community created to offer a space for those in ministry to rest, be refreshed . This is why they took this name:

'We named the charity after, and continue today to take our inspiration from, the story in Luke 10:38-42 when Jesus visits the home of Mary and Martha in Bethany. Bethany means 'poor house' and the village may have been a marginalised place. Jesus spent a lot of time here during the last weeks of his earthly ministry and experienced, not poverty, but the warmth, love and hospitality of friends in their home.'

'Hospitality is responding to the needs of anyone who comes to us, to our churches, in the way that they need, whether it is preparing food, listening to their stories or offering space and quiet. Like Martha we need to be activists. Like Mary we need to be contemplative. And like Lazarus we need to know our own needs and limits. We are all different – hospitality recognises and values these differences.'

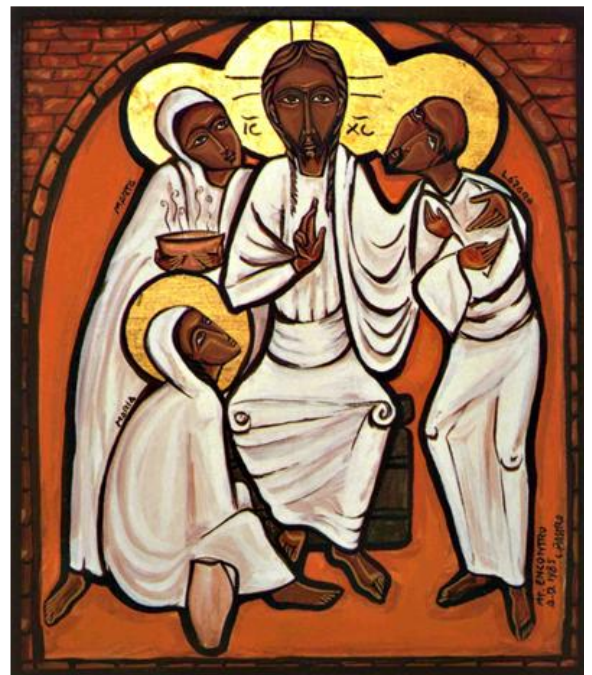
Jesus is welcomed at the home of Martha and Mary

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet and listened to what he was saying.

But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me."

But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42



Mary Anoints Jesus

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

John 12. 1 - 8

Practical Hospitality



We often think of hospitality as responding to practical needs; or demonstrating our welcome through offering food and companionship.

In the Old Testament, offering a traveller shelter, water and food was often essential for their survival and this hospitality was a key value of the stories told in Genesis

The “Hospitality of Abraham” is the inspiration for one of the best known and well-loved icons (by Rublev)

If you want to read the story, it is in Genesis 18.1-15

It is often referred to as an icon which helps us to reflect on the Trinity – the welcome and sharing at the heart of God.

You may like to use this icon to reflect on God’s welcome and sharing.

This is a section from the Inaugural sermon of Paul Bayes as Bishop of Liverpool 2014:

So there’s this table

It’s a simple table but its well-made because it was made by a carpenter. The guy who made it is a poor man but he’s generous. He offers a place to anyone who wants to sit and eat.

This is a table that started in one place but now it can stretch down every street, and it can go into every home, if people want to sit there.

It’s a table for meeting. It’s a table for talking around. It’s a table for laughing. Most of all it’s a table for eating... People can look directly at one another as they sit there, beside the poor man who made it.

Yes, most of all it’s a table for eating,.. You can’t eat alone at this table. ...It’s a table like a table at a wedding feast. You sit with guests you never knew, and you find out about them, and they become your friends.

You might want to think of times that you have been offered food or shelter.

Did you need this?

Was this an unexpected offer?

Or perhaps think of meals you have shared with people you know and people you had never met before. Does sharing food help to make a relationship with someone?

Think of all the stories in the gospels of Jesus sharing a meal, and the people he shared this with; and then the stories of the first Christian communities sharing meals. What do we learn about our welcome from God when we read these stories?

Hospitality - offering space and acceptance

Hospitality is not only offering food and company. It is offering a space where anyone is welcomed as they are and offered space to be themselves.

If we look back at Luke's story of Martha and Mary, Mary offers space and attention to Jesus. Is she attending to needs which are not just practical?

God's hospitality welcomes us as we are, with our gifts and needs, and hospitality that is inspired by faith will also try to reflect this.

You may like to read this poem by Nicola Slee slowly, and consider how everything in the world is created to be itself – and consider how we can give ourselves and other people space to be themselves.

Friend of the World

Friend of the world
Of each atom, star, stone, fish,
baby, beetle, barnacle
Your love chooses
Every particular thing about us
And cherishes it,
Rejoices in what we are
And praises it to the rafters,
Applauding us to become more
In your friendship
We can lay our competition down,
Give up all hierarchies.

We need not think ourselves better than
Butterflies, bonsai, boulders
Or worse than film stars, professors, best seller
novelists,
Solar systems, galaxies
All of us belong to each other and to you
There's room for all at your party.



The Rule of Benedict, Hospitality and Stability

The first vow laid out in Benedict's Rule is stability. It means being willing to look for God here in the constancy of this place in this rhythm of life, rather than seeking God in ever-changing places and varied routines.



The hospitality at the heart of Benedictine communities welcomes others into this space, and the rhythm of life and prayer. What was needed, Benedict taught, was simple. It was a commitment to trust in God's goodness – that he was indeed there, in that very place; and that holiness, happiness, and human fulfilment were to be found, not tomorrow or over the hill, but here – today.

Benedictine communities, and others, offer hospitality to those whom come by giving attention to them and their needs.

Hospitality, offered and received at the heart of God



This painting “Kitchen Maid with the supper at Emmaus” by Diego Velazquez asks many questions of us, as we look at it. The story of the Road to Emmaus is a wonderful example of the mutual hospitality at the heart of God’s call: on the road, Jesus has given the two disciples his time and attention, their greatest need. They offer him the hospitality of their home, and then, when the meal is brought, he in turn takes the role of host as he gives thanks and breaks the bread. (*Luke 24. 13-35*)

But in this painting, we are also reminded of those whose work makes the hospitality of others possible, and of those on the margins. In Spain at the time this was painted, black servants were common, but remained on the margins of society.

Love

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back,
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
If I lack'd anything.

‘A guest,’ I answer’d, ‘worthy to be here:’
Love said, ‘You shall be he.’
‘I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
I cannot look on Thee.’
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
‘Who made the eyes but I?’

‘Truth, Lord; but I have marr’d them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.’
‘And know you not,’ says Love, ‘Who bore the blame?’
‘My dear, then I will serve.’
‘You must sit down,’ says Love, ‘and taste my meat.’
So I did sit and eat.

George Herbert