

August 2018 Pastoral Letter

“As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.” — Luke 10:38-39

“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.” — Acts 2:46

My Dear Friends in Christ,

On July 29, the Church calendar remembered Martha and Mary of Bethany, the sisters who, with their brother Lazarus (according to the gospels of Luke and John), offer hospitality to Jesus and his disciples. More than a chance place of welcome, however, their home at Bethany apparently became a second home to Jesus as well, and very likely a place he returned to for refreshment and peace during the crowded years of his ministry. That he came specially to love this adopted family is shown most movingly in his response to the sisters’ grief over Lazarus’ death in John 11:33-35. It’s clear also that Jesus’ deep regard was mutually valued and shared.

What these Gospel episodes show us, among other things, is that Jesus was a social and sociable presence—and not the detached, enigmatic holy man often depicted in painting and film. He liked being around people. He (obviously) enjoyed attending dinners (sometimes at a moment’s notice!). His teachings and parables are marked by the bond of relationship, with Jesus connecting personally with the lives around him. So, the home at Bethany demonstrates to us the need we all have, as faithful Christians, to open the home of our hearts to each other, to offer hospitality to both friend and stranger, to take a special, intimate, social delight in the company of those with whom we share life’s journey.

We have, of course, a weekly example on the parish level of the witness we are called to give on the global level. Our time of Hospitality after the late Sunday service reflects Christ’s invitation to us to engage others personally and socially. Rather than a separate feature of the Sunday observance, fellowship is an integral part of it—the natural extension of the Exchange of Peace we make before the Offertory and the whole communal feast we call the Holy Eucharist.

Sadly, I’ve noticed a gradual falling off of participation in Hospitality here at Transfiguration since I first came. I’m sure there are a number of different reasons for this, prominent among them the very busy lives we live weekdays and weekends. Given our need to make the most of the rest of a Sunday, it’s much easier, I’m sure, to walk in the direction of the parking lot instead of the parish hall! (And as for our eight o’clock folks, there is no time at all set aside for Hospitality!). Yet by doing so, we are missing out on a principal part of our communal gathering. In the Eucharist we are fed

with the Body and Blood of Christ; in Hospitality we are fed with the reaffirming love of fellowship.

Very soon a short online survey will be sent to you, asking you to evaluate our current practice of hospitality. A print copy of the survey will also be available. Questions will include such things as how often we should schedule Hospitality to what form it should take (and whether a time of fellowship should be offered for those at the early service). I hope you'll take time to respond, as it will be helpful in planning our Sunday program for this coming parish year—and in letting me know how the church can best feed you! Thank you in advance for your interest and assistance.

Seeking to live out the Lord's words to his disciples in John's gospel (13:35), early Christians were identified not simply by what they believed or how they worshipped, but by how well they "loved one another." Let us continually seek that life as well, in what we profess and in what we share, in sacrament and relationship, in active faith and personal love.

Many blessings,
Fr. Gordon +