

16th Sunday per Annum - C
Genesis 18:1-10a;
Colossians 1:24-28;
Luke 10:38-42
Little Flower - 7/21/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

As good as it is to go on vacation, it is always good to come home. As a priest, I can identify with the Martha and Mary story in today's Gospel. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were Jesus' close friends. Their home was a home where he could visit, relax, and feel at home. The extended family with whom I spend my vacation gives me a place to visit, relax, and feel at home.

However, vacation is almost like school for me. It teaches me about family life today. The family consists of the mother, her four daughters and their husbands, and twelve grandchildren ranging from a junior in college to second grade twins. Today's Gospel offers some of the same lessons I learned while I was away. As much as things change, they often remain the same.

If nothing else, today's Gospel teaches us that families are complicated and family dynamics are complicated. In today's Gospel, Martha was doing all the work. From Jesus, we know that she was also anxious and worried about many things. On the other hand, Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to him. Not surprisingly, Martha got upset with Mary. There was evident tension between them. In families, everyone may love each other but not always like each other.

Also, in marriages, it is not uncommon that at least one of the partners does not deal well with tension and conflict and will do almost anything to avoid tension and conflict. Sometimes the person comes from a family where tension and conflict were endemic. Other times the person comes from a family where tension and conflict were avoided. In either case, one or both partners may feel threatened by any disagreement or conflict. Unfortunately, some couples who communicate very well on most issues never learn to communicate well when it comes to disagreements and conflicts. Several years ago, a couple I was preparing for marriage really impressed me because they had already learned how to resolve disagreements and conflicts constructively before their marriage.

One author has suggested that the difference between functional and dysfunctional families is not the presence or absence of problems but how problems are handled. The other interesting dynamic in today's Gospel was Martha's attempt to put Jesus into the middle of her conflict with Mary. This was a kind of triangulation. Jesus, however, refused to get in the middle. Problems will be resolved more constructively when resolved directly by the people involved.

My brothers and sisters, hospitality was one of the most important values in the Ancient Middle East. Obviously, Martha and Mary were practicing hospitality by welcoming Jesus into their home. In today's first reading, we see the extent of Abraham and Sarah's hospitality to the three men. Clearly the five families with whom I spend my vacation offer me great hospitality. I would suggest, however, that the kind of hospitality that people need and want today is for us to welcome them into our lives and hearts. In other words, they want to be welcomed into our lives and hearts more than our homes.

Hospitality is also an important ministry in the Church. For example, ushers and greeters are ministers of hospitality. However, at Sunday Mass, we all need to be ministers of hospitality. For example, we need to greet people who sit with us in the pew, and we need to introduce ourselves to people whose names we do not know, especially if they look like visitors. Currently the Church talks a lot about the New Evangelization and Re-Evangelization. I would suggest hospitality is one of the primary ways we can evangelize and re-evangelize at Sunday Liturgy.