

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's readings offer three different reflections.

The stories in the first eleven chapters of Genesis are called pre-history. History in the Bible begins with God's call and promise to Abraham in chapter 12: "*I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you...*" [2a]. In today's first reading, God promises to give him and Sarah a son to fulfill God's promise into the future.

However, today's first reading also teaches us the meaning of the virtue of hospitality. When Abraham saw the three men in front of his tent, he asked them to stay, bathe their feet, rest a while, and then eat and drink, hospitality they readily accepted. He even killed a tender, choice steer. When dinner was served, he personally served them.

We tend to think of hospitality as more of a social grace than a virtue. For us, hospitality often means simply entertaining people. Scripture scholar Fr. Aelred Cody once told me that some of the Middle Eastern desert tribes even today believe that if they are attacked when they have guests, they have to be willing to sacrifice their lives to protect their guests. I would suggest that hospitality as a virtue means more than simply entertaining people but welcoming them and allowing them into our lives. As the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, "*Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels*" [13:2].

As those of us who are older were growing up, we were frequently told to offer up our sufferings to God for others. Today's second reading provides a basis for that teaching. Paul wrote that he was rejoicing because through his sufferings he was filling up in his flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of Christ's body, the Church. Although we know that nothing is lacking in Christ's sufferings, we also know that we can join our sufferings to his for the ongoing salvation of the world. For example, when suffering people still show their faith and hope in God, their witness contributes to the ongoing salvation of the world.

Finally, today's Gospel tells the story of Martha and Mary's hospitality to Jesus. However, what is important in the story is the tension between Martha and Mary and Jesus' response. Mary was seated at the feet of Jesus listening to him; Martha was doing all the work of preparing and serving. Martha asked Jesus if he did not care that she was left to do all the work. All of us can identify with Martha's frustration. However, instead of rebuking Mary, Jesus challenged Martha, telling her that listening to him, Mary had chosen the better part. It is important to remember that Jesus was not rebuking Martha for what she was doing but for complaining about what Mary was not doing.

What are we to make of this story? First, some people tend to be more active; others tend to be more reflective or contemplative. The world needs both kinds of people. If there were no Marthas, there would be no dinner. However, most people are both, generally more of one than the other. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle wrote, "*In medio stat virtus*," or "virtue stands in the middle," or "virtue stands in balance." A balance between action and contemplation is best.

My brothers and sisters, this suggests that we all need to seek balance in every area of our lives. If we want to be healthy, if we want to become the-best-version-of-ourselves, if we want to be holy, we need to seek to balance our physical, intellectual, emotional, social, sexual, and spiritual needs! The same is true of our relationships. There are four primary relationships in our lives: our relationship with God, our many relationships with others, our relationship with ourselves, and our relationship with the world in which we live. We can only be healthy if we work at keeping them all in balance. Unfortunately, more often than not, it is our relationship with God that is most neglected. We fail to make time to pray; we fail to make time to attend Sunday Eucharist. If we want to be healthy and holy, all of our relationships must be balanced.