

II Kings 4: 8-11, 14-16
Psalm 89: 2-3, 16-17, 18-19
Rom 6: 3-4, 8-11
Mt 10: 37-42

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Many of us grew up with images of the Lone Ranger and Zoro, the masked bandit. Who was that stranger? They always seemed to come unexpectedly and do only good. Well, today's first reading is about a visitor also, Elisha, the prophet. The real focus is not to be on Elisha, but rather on Shunem, the hostess who welcomes this holy man. Barren for many years, Shunem and her husband wanted a child. 'This time next year you will be fondling a baby son, Elisha told her.' If it were not for the couple's sense of welcome and hospitality they never would have experienced the birth of their son. The old adage that we never give that it is not returned a hundredfold comes to mind. The Lord will never be outdone in His generosity if we but welcome the stranger and give but a cup of water in His name.

How blessed we are to have been gifted with faith. In Baptism we died with Christ and through Christ we are called to new life in Him. If we look at our lives we soon realize that all things are gift to us. Should we love the gift more than the Giver of the gift? In and through Christ the gift of eternal life has been offered to us. Jesus tells us in the Gospel reading today that He wants us not to lose sight of the greatest gift of all -Himself. If we truly love the Lord how can we not love and appreciate all that has been given to us, our family, careers, vocations, fame and fortune. If however, we cherish all these things more than the Lord we are lost and have received our just reward which is a temporary and passing reward at best. Jesus is the gift that is everlasting and He keeps lavishing His love unconditionally upon us.

St. Augustine tells us that when the Christ within self loves the other then we truly experience the enfleshed, incarnate Jesus. Sometimes Christ comes to us in the stranger or unexpected guest. Hospitality is a trait that we can develop and perfect. The next time we meet friend or foe let us be open to meeting the Christ within them, truly the unexpected guest.