

## Sixteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Cycle C

Genesis 18:1-10a

Ps 15:2-3, 3-4, 5

Col 1:24-28

Lk 10:38-42

Donald F. Reilly, O.S.A.

A kindergarten teacher was making her way through her classroom while her students were drawing whatever came to their minds. She found herself next to a little girl whose drawing, the subject of which, wasn't quite clear. The teacher asked the child: "What are your drawing?" The little girl said: "The face of God." The teacher leaned down toward the girl and whispered: "No one has ever seen God." The little girl looked up at her and said: "They will in a minute."

Each of us has an image of God which is drawn daily through our words and actions. We communicate a unique image of God by the way we live our lives. We are the way in which others can come to know God. Scripture does offer us a glimpse of who God is, more, of how God is among us. In today's scriptural readings we understand one way of how God is, namely, as hospitality. Each of the three readings today defines the ways in which hospitality can be expressed: sharing of material possessions with those who need them; passing on knowledge and wisdom in order to enhance the life of another, and, creating safe and respectful places so that people can know their own value and worth.

In the first reading from Genesis, Abraham and Sarah give of their material possession, food and drink and a place to rest, to "strangers" passing by their home. Abraham and Sarah seize the opportunity to extend hospitality as if it were a personal mandate or something required by law. This kind of hospitality is, perhaps, the most common. It is a form of gratitude for all that we have been given in life. Something wonderful happens deep within us when we do give of our possessions; it seems right and the way things should be in the world. To hoard our possessions seems to indicate that we are solely responsible for what we have been given and that our neighbor has not been blessed or selected as worthy in this life.

The second reading from Paul to the Colossians is a form of hospitality expressed in nourishing another's spirit by sharing our experience of God's great delight in us and others. This kind of hospitality enables people to root themselves in a tradition of faith that offers a way of life leading to peacefulness and interior tranquility. We care for others, through this kind of hospitality, by celebrating what Paul calls in this reading "the mystery hidden from ages and generations past," namely, our God is in relationship with us. Withholding our experience of faith from others depletes the human experience and dislodges people from a connection to a loving Creator.

The gospel from Luke depicts hospitality as safety and respect. While Martha is concerned with hospitality as sharing possessions, Mary's desire is to provide Jesus with a safe and respectful place. Mary assumes that, at times, Jesus needed to be cherished and valued for who he was. The safety and respect shown to Jesus by Mary enabled him to relax and restore himself without any expectation on the part of his host. Then as now, safety and respect communicate to people that being a person reveals an image of God. Only when we feel safe and cherished can we speak of our image of God.

Like the little girl who had the confidence to draw a picture of God, we, too, share our image of God by the way we receive people into our lives. Our various expressions of hospitality are our pencils and brushes. Our deepest hope is that people will see and love in us what we see and love in our God.