
WORD MADE FLESH

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Genesis 18:1-10; Colossians 1:24-28; Luke 10:38-42

Welcoming the Presence*

Both the Genesis and Gospel reading show Christ being welcomed. They speak of the depth and significance of hospitality and call us to the path of preparation for the welcoming of the divine presence.

"The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as Abraham sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day." In patristic literature Abraham represents an ideal of asceticism and obedience to God, a man characterized by *hesychia*, *praotes* and *justice*. Those three words are pathways into the meaning of today's readings.

"Hesychia" is a wonderful Greek word which we usually translate as "stillness." The purpose of stillness is our healing so, like Abraham and Mary, we are able to welcome the presence of God. Our feelings and perceptions need to be quieted for our body to be brought to stillness. Similarly, our thoughts need to be quieted, as the Church Fathers and Spiritual Mothers have taught, so our soul can come to stillness. Gregory of Sinai says, "Hesychia means cutting off all thoughts except the most divine which come from the Spirit, lest in accepting the former as good, we lose what is greater." Stillness, the first fruit of prayer, is the necessary preparation for welcoming the divine presence.

"Praotes", our second word, is the virtue of "gentleness" or "mildness", which Saint John Chrysostom proclaimed to be the quality that best distinguishes humans from beasts. It is the virtue of accepting our limitations. More precisely, it is the recognition that we cannot rule the souls of other persons.

Our third word is justice. We must not run over it too quickly but remember that it is the daughter of charity, the fount of our friendship with God. Justice is "a disposition of the will which inclines us to give to every person what is her or his due with a view to the common good of the whole society."

Where there is stillness, gentleness can flower. A gentle spirit inclines the will to give to the other what is his or her due.

Abraham and Mary had the capacity for presence, for spiritual hospitality, because they had come to a certain stillness of body and soul. They had the capacity for recognizing Christ in their midst because of the stillness at the centre of their being. Both Abraham and Mary responded with hospitality; with the attentiveness that was due the Christ in their midst. Their wills had been transformed.

On this Sunday of Hospitality, we pray for the courage to step onto that path which leads through the desert of stillness to the transformation of our will and into the glory of Christ's presence.

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