

The Theology of Christian Hospitality

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Everything that was said about simply human hospitality remains valid when we talk about Christian hospitality.

What I will call **the theology of Christian hospitality is illuminated and dissolves in the light of the theology of marriage.** In the sacrament of marriage, the couple is involved in the mystery of Christ. Indeed, while baptism associates an individual with the mystical Body so that they live and experience the very life of the Body, **the sacrament of marriage associates spouses, man and woman since they are a single 'being,' with the mystical Body.** And this is so that the couple (and the family community that is the fruit of their union) lives and experiences the life of the Body fully. The family is the only human society, which, as such, is incorporated in the mystical Body, and assumed in the order of grace. A nation or even a monastery are not. So it must be said that the Christian couple is a constituent part of the mystical Body. When John XXIII talked to the Teams of Our Lady, he called the Christian home a 'cell of the Church,' a cell of the mystical Body. The expression is very strong. The family is an 'ecclesiuncula', a church in miniature...a House-God.

I am in your midst

What characterizes Christian hospitality is precisely the opening of this Church cell to welcome the guest in its midst not only to offer them human riches, but essentially Christ's presence. Because where there is the Church, albeit a cell of the Church, there also is Christ. He said it explicitly, "Where two or three of you are gathered in my Name, there am I in your midst." And certainly, often guests ignore all these spiritual realities. They do not see beyond the words of friendship welcoming them, beyond the love of this man and woman, beyond this family life. But in fact, these realities are as if sacramentalised and through them Jesus Christ, unknown to the guests, makes them sense divine realities and already gives them his grace, if only they do not refuse it.

Every time it is possible and if it is not out of line, guests ought to be welcomed into the very heart of home life: family prayer. Or at least they ought to have the opportunity to participate if they so wish and they ought to be made to understand that this very intimate space is not off-limits to them.

Christian hospitality opens up its intimacy. That is one of its characteristics and indeed is probably the best way of letting the guest discover the secret of this hospitality that is so good to their heart. This house has a soul and now they discover this soul to be lively and vibrant, especially at family prayer time.

A Relay on the Road

The Christian home has a specific vocation—hospitality. A Christian home is a relay on the road to the great Church. It is a ‘sacrament’ of the Church and such a human sacrament: ‘the smiling and soft face of the Church,’ as one Teams couple put it.

The Christian home is a sermon without words, and yet astonishingly persuasive. No need even to speak the same language. A man and woman who love each other, a child’s smile, peace in the home, they are all part of an international language. Christian marriage, according to what theology teaches, is the mirror image of the intimacy that exists between Christ and the Church. Something of this divine reality filters down through the man and woman’s love and deposits in their heart something like a mysterious calling.

In order to define an apostolic mission of such importance, a big word is necessary: **the home plays the role of ‘mediation’ between the Church and the world.** As mediator, it is the *means* and the *place* where God meets men.

I am referring to the Christian home, the home of good will, where guests see people who know how to forgive each other, who realize that they are sinners and who, at the same time, are sure of their God’s mercy. In such a home, there is no need to dazzle the guest and the family is true to itself in the guest’s presence. Isn’t this the great law of Christian testimonials?

The idea is to practise this ministry of hospitality, as a delegate of the Christian community. “Compete with the Church,” as St John Chrysostom advised his faithful.

Simplicity, Truth, Joy, Love

It is important to reflect upon the art of welcoming in a Christian home, but I will just enumerate the following qualities of Christian hospitality: simplicity, truth, joy and love.

Simplicity is what helps the guest realise and understand that they are not a stranger, but a friend and brother. *Joy*: “the home must be a place of discreet

joy,” according to one couple and it must also “be a place of *love*, because this is the only way for people to long for it,” according to another.

I was a Stranger…

The originality of Christian hospitality resides not only in what is done for the guest, but also in the way in which they are considered. By honouring and serving the guest, the Christian home honours and serves Christ himself. The guest becomes a ‘sacrament’ through which God transmits his grace to the Christian home.

Jesus Christ never ceased to come amongst his own. What does hospitality reveal to us about the divine world?

Read also ‘The Symbolism of Hospitality.’