

## 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time Cycle C, July 28, 2013

### A Closed Church

I remember when my pastor informed my parish, St. Emily, that the church would no longer be open 24/7 due to the rise in vandalism. All the churches in my area were always unlocked, providing a quiet place to pray and just be with the Lord. The greatest frustration I had on the Camino was the closed, locked churches. As I mentioned on the blog, I was chased out of two different churches...by a priest!!! It seems my prayer interrupted the siesta. The whole basis of the Camino is to be welcomed and treated with hospitality as we journeyed our way to Santiago.

In the first reading, Abraham ran out to greet the three strangers and welcomed them into his "home." He didn't wait for them to come to him but took the initiative as if it were his life's calling to create hospitality. And so it was. Wonderful things happen when our hearts formed to be welcoming and open to the stranger in our midst. The three angelic messengers responded to the hospitality shown them by telling Abraham that Sarah, who could not conceive a child, would give birth to a son, Isaac within a year's time. Hospitality creates new life in many different forms.

What about us? We are an open and welcoming parish but our doors are largely locked shut except for a few hours of worship. We have a unique challenge that God has given us, one that many parishes do not have: our church building is on a busy street in a thriving neighborhood with hundreds of "pilgrims" passing by each and everyday. We have perhaps thousands of un-churched people in our neighborhood who aren't going to just show up at the door. We have to go out to them, in the fashion of Abraham.

How can we become more hospitable, as individuals and as a parish? I think Mary the sister of Martha gives us the answer: spend time with the Lord, listening to him in our prayer. We need to expand our experience of prayer by letting go of "saying" our prayers, something we do when starting out, to quietly sitting in the presence of the Lord. Christ was "feeding" Mary with his presence and love. Martha was doing just fine until she got ticked off and frenzied because she was doing all the work and Mary was doing "nothing" but sitting at the feet of Jesus. Being hospitable means giving the person what they need, and Jesus wanted Mary's attention. Being hospitable means giving and receiving.

During our Loaves and Fishes dinners, the people who prepare and serve need to stop the activity of serving and sit down at a table with our guests and learn their names and stories...share your own...giving and receiving. Eating with our guests is the highest form of hospitality. We "receive" not by doing a good deed, but by engaging in the humanity of the ones we serve.

What else can we do to "open wide the doors to Christ," creating a place where people are welcomed during our liturgies and throughout the week? Somehow, we need to find ways of going out to the people on the streets inviting them in. And like Abraham, we may very well be entertaining angels.