

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple-- truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

The rabbi's had a saying: "The one who shows hospitality to the wise is as if an offering of the first fruits of your harvest was offered to God."

When Jesus said the words of today's Gospel, he was using a way of speaking that Jews regularly used. The Hebrew people always felt that to receive a person's envoy or messenger, was the same as to receive the person himself. To pay respect to an ambassador was the same as to pay respect to the ruler who sent him. It was particularly true with regard to wise men and those who taught God's truth. The twist in the Gospel is to include in the list both "prophets" and "these little ones" to the list of those who require hospitality.

Today's Gospel is about Christian Hospitality – to three different groups of people

1. The prophet: those persons who challenge us with difficult truth – the truth of the Gospel with its demands for Godly living in every respect.
2. The righteous person: those persons who model in their lives a right relationship with God – charity, love, hope, joy with their brothers and sisters of humanity. Those who manifest the path of righteous living – generosity and faithfulness, temperance and playfulness.
3. The needy person: those persons whose needs have a claim on our lives and our resources, irregardless of race, ethnicity, clothing, mental health, gender

Boiled down, this means hospitality to the bishop, to the priest, to the deacon, and to the people whom you are asked to serve, through our proclamation and our living of the Gospel.

From a book entitled: Living Biblically, it is suggested that there are 4 links in the chain of salvation or the healing of the world:

1. There is a God out of whose love the whole creation comes, and from whom the process of the healing of creation begins.
2. There is Jesus who brought that message to all of humankind.
3. There is the human messenger – the prophet who speaks, the disciple who learns, the apostle who passes on the good news, the good person who sets an example
4. Finally, there is the believer who welcomes the message and the messengers, and finds life for his/her soul

We cannot all be prophets, but we can give the gift of hospitality. Great people are always dependent on many others who support them, but who remain largely unknown: For

example, the women who traveled with Jesus and secured food and cooked for the group; or the people who welcomed him into their homes. We can receive a prophet's reward.

We are not all shining public examples of God's goodness all the time, but we can all support goodness, in so many ways. Every little effort to support the Body of Christ is important for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

(Tell story of the unnamed and unknown charwoman who befriended and helped Annie Sullivan, who eventually helped Helen Keller, who eventually touched the entire world with her life.)

We cannot all be great teachers like Annie Sullivan, but we can support the needs of children and of teaching. We cannot all be preachers, but we can support the needs of the church to enable good preachers.

The Church and Christ will always need prophets and great preachers and great leaders, but the Lord also needs simple acts of hospitality: "All service ranks the same with God,.. said Mrs. Browning." (Robert Browning)

May we all be called to the radical hospitality of Christ.
Amen.

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