

Excerpts comprising this devotion on HOSPITALITY are brought to you by: *Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love*, by Lonni Collins Pratt and Fr. Daniel Homen. This gem of a book, which I encourage you to read in its entirety, profoundly pierces the soul while examining the nitty gritty of what hospitality *actually* means through the lens of the centuries old Benedictine practice of receiving each guest as Christ himself. It is about inviting strangers into our hearts, and truly seeing them. St. Benedict was an Italian monk born in the 5th century who established guidelines (*The Rule*-based on the teachings of Jesus) that became the norm for monastic living throughout Europe. One does not need to be a monk and live in a monastic community to appreciate the depth and breadth of this work, which I present, in part, for our week ahead. Each day read Luke 10:25-37, followed by the daily devotional. Be intentional in setting aside time to journal, reflect, or discuss each day's devotion. Be blessed, Kristen (Italicized portions are mine-all the rest is directly quoted from the book.)

MONDAY

Hospitality is about making space for others—both in the world and in our hearts. Benedict tells us to offer an open heart, a stance of availability, and to look for God lurking in every single person who comes through the door. This includes, but is certainly not limited to worship on Sunday morning.

By accepting someone, we do what seems to be a small, ordinary thing...but little acts of giving, one upon another, pile up to create a huge force capable of repelling darkness and transforming the world. A friendly conversation with a stranger at a bus stop can be the embodiment of hospitality that will change everything. When we build a life of acceptance, we build a new kind of kingdom among us.

Acceptance is not about condoning; it is about embracing...It is about receiving rather than judging... We stand in the same space [as a stranger] and we appreciate who they are, right now at this moment and affirm the Sacred in them.

Imagine a person who is completely different from you in every single way—dress, language, religion, political party, skin color, socio-economic status, etc. What would it look like for you to accept this stranger if they sat next to you in worship? How can you affirm the Sacred in them?

TUESDAY

Hospitality is at the heart of Christianity. No one has ever been more radically welcoming than Jesus, who was always accused of associating with the wrong kind of people—people we wouldn't want in our living rooms, or next to us in worship.

If we take seriously the call to radical hospitality, we will discover the true meaning of ministry.

The phrase 'radical hospitality' refers to the activities and desires that inspire individuals and communities to welcome those who are unlike themselves...accepting the person with no thought of personal benefit. Instead of seeking persons who will support the congregation, actively seek persons who need the support of the congregation. To become more hospitable means finding ways to welcome the marginalized, forgotten, and misunderstood among us.

...It isn't about results; it's about changing the universe by becoming available to one person in one sliver of time.

Who is someone who needs the support of our congregation? Invite them to worship, a small group or event, while walking alongside them.

WEDNESDAY

In order to guide the monks as they lived and grew toward the Divine together, St. Benedict crafted a simple, short document called 'The Rule of St. Benedict'...The Rule is based on the teachings of Jesus. A 'rule' is...what makes your life worthwhile. It is an expression of how you are spending your energy... Your rule is the glue that holds your life together. By Your Rule you make choices about how you will spend your time and resources; you make choices about how you spend yourself.

'The Rule of St. Benedict' begins with an invitation to listen.

"My dear friends, be quick to LISTEN [and] slow to speak..."—James 1:18

Listening involves not only the ears, but the heart—sensing needs or feelings. This requires us to take the time and effort to pay attention from the depths of our being.

No small feat—but one to which we are called.

Commit to being present and truly listening to each and every person you encounter for an entire day. Journal about this experience. What if you listened with this much intention every day? How might your life change? What about the lives of those you listened to?

THURSDAY

In the story of the good Samaritan, the people who ignore the dying man are like us. They have things to do. They are trying very hard to get it all done. They aren't vicious people, but they do consider caution a virtue. It was the "wrong" kind of person...a Samaritan, who stopped to help...who went the extra mile and put himself on the line...gave his time, energy, and resources. To the religious community the Samaritan was unclean, a stranger, and utterly unacceptable—and yet a model of hospitality.

This story is about us, and it is about strangers. We are called to be the kind stranger, to be kind to strangers, and to hold our breaths in wonder at the healing power of the stranger among us.

The story is also a reminder that every one of us is going to be beaten up and waiting for healing at the side of the road. You don't have to live long before you realize that no one escapes pain.

Saint Benedict wrote from his [belief] that life truly is a journey and we are all co-travelers who need one another if we are to get home.

Reread the underlined portion: how does the Church get it wrong today?

How can we better live out Benedict's conviction that we are co-travelers who need one? How might our culture change with the Church leading by example in this way?

Think about the last time you were 'beaten up and lying on the side of the road'. Who helped you? Did you resist their help at all? Why? What feelings did this experience evoke in you?

FRIDAY

Hospitality is risky, and it is scary...[So often] fear shapes our choices. Fear keeps us from living our lives freely.

Unless we find a way to open ourselves to others, we will grow even more isolated and frightened.

If we do not find and practice ways of hospitality, we will grow increasingly hostile.

[Have you noticed any hostility in the world lately?]

Hospitality is the answer to hostility.

Jesus said to love your neighbor: hospitality is how.

Once you get over linking hospitality to the travel industry and dinner parties, you still have to deal with that awkward reality of strangers. Hospitality involves accepting responsibility to care for the strangers...The biggest obstacle to hospitality is not the state of the world. It is the state of our minds and hearts. It is the comfort we crave so badly that we will do almost anything for it.

Hospitality requires not grand gestures, but open hearts...When I reach past my own ideas, I begin to stretch open to the world, and this opening of my heart could change everything. That's pretty frightening stuff. You can't ever be the same if you start doing that kind of thing.

...Hospitality comes easily for those who have known mostly acceptance and love. For other people it will come harder.

Engage with the 3 underlined portions in your journal. Take each one separately and jot down your thoughts and responses to these statements, their possible impact in your life, and the lives of those you encounter. Be honest and talk with God.

SATURDAY

When we speak of hospitality we are always addressing issues of inclusion and exclusion...Our entire culture excludes many people. If you are in a wheelchair, for example, you are excluded because there are places you can't go. If you are very young, if you are very old, you are excluded...Women are excluded, as are people of color and those who practice a religion different from our own.

Even though Jesus said that he had come to "proclaim good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18) and that they were blessed (Luke 6:20), the poor are always excluded, e.g. one in six children in America live in poverty. These children will, most likely grow up to a lifetime of exclusion. Somewhere, sometime, you were excluded. Remember what that was like. Some people live with the experience constantly.

Hospitality is not a mere social grace; it is a spiritual and ethical issue...involving what it means to be human. All of our talk about hospitable openness doesn't mean anything as long as some people continue to be tossed aside. [Hospitality] is a spiritual practice, a way of becoming more human, a way of understanding yourself. [It] is both the answer to modern alienation and injustice *and* a path to a deeper spirituality.

Read Luke 4:18. In what ways do Jesus' words intersect with hospitality?

Like other spiritual disciplines, hospitality requires practice for us to grow. Look for ways to practice hospitality today.

Explore how hospitality can be the answer to alienation and injustice, and to what God might be calling you in those areas.

What are your main take-aways from this week's devotions? How will you respond?