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Celebrating Christ in a Benedictine Sort of Way

Funny thing...I was thinking that the Christ child, his mom and earthly dad, might have all been safe and warm in an inside room that first Christmas, if only the inn keeper had been Benedictine. Now, despite the obvious historical problems with that statement...I think I can explain.


But before the explanation, let me also say that I would surely not presume to tell any of you how to have a celebration, I am sure you all know how to have a good time without my advice. But, just recently I spent a couple days on retreat at Richardton, the Benedictine Monastery of Sacred Heart. Part of our focus was the Rule of St. Benedict, and part of that rule was the practice of hospitality. And *that* hospitality should season the season of celebration.

Benedictine hospitality, I have come to understand, is much more than simply greeting a fellow Christian, much more than having folks over to dinner. Hospitality is a spiritual state of opening up one's heart to the needs of others. It is a sort of spiritual ethic complete unto itself. Benedictines adopt Hospitality as a life long goal and holy practice. It seems to me to be the practical end of the command to love one's neighbor as yourself.

To be truly hospitable is to practice the radical love of Jesus Christ, not for a day, but till life passes from your body. For a Christian congregation, for example, it may mean nearly eternal dedication to many loving practices, but it most certainly means to welcome familiar faces and newcomers of all ages with joy and an attitude of helpfulness. But, it also means taking them into your company with fellowship and genuine interest.

Now, brace yourself, because this true Christian hospitality calls for deeper commitment still. To be hospitable may mean putting your own needs on hold to help another, or even sacrificing for another's welfare or care. It may mean bending group membership rules a bit, so a fellow human can take part, thus feeling accepted. Further, it suggests a sort of generosity that goes way beyond lending a pal a couple of bucks; it asks for significant giving without the specter of payback. It asks us to fight our personal prejudices without regard to race, creed, gender, politics, sexual orientation and more, in order to see the Christ in everyone, and reach out with the love that heals and saves.

In the light of the divisiveness flowing from the 2003 General Convention, it is so heartening to know that hospitality in a Benedictine way, seems to ask how can we



include (not exclude) a fellow human in a loving circle. I would like to think that sentiment represents of the best of Anglican thinking, as well as a Benedictine Rule. So, dear friends, I would like to suggest that in this remaining time of Advent, and through the Christmas time (at least to begin with), that we follow a call to this sort of hospitality ... One could begin by welcoming those folks who come through our doors, and treating them as the Benedictine's would, that is, as if he or she were the Christ. Maybe in this way we can celebrate and honor the Christ child, by being the living spiritual Inn from which no one would be turned away. ja+