

Hospitality and Passionist Family Groups.

1. What is Hospitality

Hospitality has been described as 'extravagant generosity'. More humourously, it has been said that true hospitality is making someone feel at home when you wish they were!

A Dictionary describes hospitality as '**the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers**'.

The root of the word comes from the Latin word **Hospes** which means a stranger or foreigner received as a guest. From this word we have in English, the words, *host*, *hostel*, *hotel*, *hospice*, *hospital*, *hospitality*.

Metonymy is a figure of speech that describes something by something else associated with it rather by its own name, but. Americans refer to the White house, New Zealanders refer to the Beehive. Australians refer to the Esky. The expression, "The pen is mightier than the sword" is another example of a metonym. In a similar way, *hospes* came to mean a guest's lodging or an inn and *hospitium* came to signify hospitality, It is easy to see the connection with the term hospital.

Hospitality, but its definition is generous and is offered to stranger as well as friend. We commonly say to someone, "make yourself at home", as a typical gesture of hospitality.

1. What's your best story of someone making you feel at home, or a story you have heard about someone offering this kind of hospitality.

2a. Biblical hospitality

The book of Genesis describes a divine encounter. *"One day, Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent at Mamre. during the hottest part of the day. He looked up and noticed three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he ran to meet them and welcomed them, bowing low to the ground"*. Abraham had them rest in the shade. He washed their feet and prepared a meal for them. **In** offering hospitality to these three strangers, Abraham encountered God (Genesis 18:1-18). This has always been a pointer to the possibility that when one welcomes a guest one may be welcoming the divine presence. The famous 'Trinity' icon by Reblev depicts the three divine agents who visited Abraham.

The people of Israel were both hosts (in their own land) and guests (when captives in Babylon and Egypt). Jewish tradition called for people to treat a stranger as one of your own and to be mindful of the poor, immigrants, orphans and widows.

“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the immigrant”. (Lev 19:9-10)

“When an immigrant resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The immigrant residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were immigrants in Egypt”. (Lev: 19:33-34)

“God defends the cause of the orphan and the widow, and loves the immigrant residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are immigrants, for you yourselves were immigrants in Egypt”. (Deut 10:18-19)

Hospitality was an integral part of Judaism and this is a common characteristic across middle-eastern communities.

2. How might Biblical hospitality be reflected by us today?

2b Monastic hospitality

Former missiology professor David Bosch suggested “Monasticism expressed mission through hospitality to rich and poor alike. *“For upwards of seven hundred years . . . the monastery was notably the centre of culture and civilization, but also of mission. In the midst of a world ruled by love of self, the monastic communities were a visible sign and preliminary realization of a world ruled by the love of God.”*

Monasteries were a hive of activity for the benefit of the entire surrounding community. Each monastery was a vast complex of buildings, churches, workshops, stores, and almshouses. They existed along trade routes and provided food, lodging, and protection for travellers and pilgrims. Monastic spirituality was spiritual – a welcome was offered to people because of a belief that each person is Christ. Around 540CE Benedict wrote in his rule, *“All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me’.* This reflects Jesus’ call that *“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me”* (Matthew 10:40).

Benedict held that every person in the monastery was a guest, even the monks themselves, since each of them came into the dwelling place of God”.

While monasteries were primarily for the monks to be preserved from the distractions of the external world, they did not see themselves as separate from the world, and it was hoped that through their mission of hospitality, others might encounter God.

In his rule of life, Paul of the Cross, the founder of the Passionists, called for every Passionist community to have a good number of poor but comfortable rooms for priests and laypersons so that they could experience the solitude of the retreat and experience the love of God through the cross.

3. Have you experience monastic hospitality? If not, how do you imagine it?

4. How can hospitality allow your home to be a place of mission?

3. Gospel hospitality

From the time of Mary's famed visit to her cousin Elizabeth and Jesus birth in a stable, the gospel is filled with stories of visits to home by Jesus and his disciples. Hospitality was a hallmark of Jesus ministry. He was both host and guest. He did not run projects, create programmes, or put on events. He shared meals with all sorts of people, especially the poor and outcast. He noted that he had been called "a drunkard and a glutton".

Jesus was invited into many homes. Most of the homes he stayed in are not recorded because he visited many towns, not just within Judea, but in Tyre and Sidon and stayed there as a guest. He attended a wedding feast at Cana. He visited Peter's house, the house of Simon the Pharisee, Jairus' house, Martha's house in Bethany; a house in Tyre and Sidon;

Jesus invited himself to people's homes, such as Zacchaeus, and he welcomed people to his own home in Capernaum. More important than inviting people into his home, or visiting others, is that he invited people into his life. Even as a guest, he was host.

One famous visit of Jesus is to the house of Martha and Mary in Bethany. This was also the house of Jesus' friend Lazarus, so it is likely he visited there often. The story of his visit focuses on Jesus cautioning Martha that she is distracted by her hospitality. While Mary is listening to Jesus, Martha is keeping herself busy with all the serving. Most of us have experienced something similar, when the host is so busy trying to make everything right, that there is actually little opportunity for engagement.

Jesus did not go to their house just to eat. He wanted an encounter. Our guests too, are not in our homes primarily to eat. They are there for fellowship. A host can be so busy serving others, that they do not allow others to become involved in service, nor do they allow time for dialogue. People feel at home if they are helping, especially in the kitchen

There are more than forty accounts of Jesus sharing meals with a wide variety of people. It was during these meals that Jesus was involved in his mission, He taught, healed and reached out to people. His meals were his mission.

It is one thing to say that we should care for migrants, the homeless, the disadvantaged, the sick and disabled – Jesus did it – through meals. He challenges us to make our homes the place of our mission.

During one meal, Jesus washed the disciples feet. This was more than a simple foot washing. This was an act of service. *“Do you understand what I have done?”*, he asked. *The action was a powerful symbol.*

When Pope Francis washed the feet of two woman and a Muslim in a juvenile jail last Holy Thursday, it was a powerful symbol that challenged some people, who claimed “the Church only allows for men’s feet to be washed at the Holy Thursday ritual”. Pope Francis wanted to give this ritual the meaning it truly has. Jesus wanted us to be hospitable (generous) servants.

5. What is the significance of homes in Jesus’ ministry?

6. What is the significance of meals in Jesus’ ministry?

7. Jesus washed his disciples feet as a sign of service. What, for you, is a strong sign or symbol of true hospitality?

4. Christian Hospitality

Hospitality is integral to Christian living. We are called to have open hands, open hearts, and open doors. Hospitality offers people a space to rest and be renewed, and to go on their (God’s) way. We must practice serving, by making people feel special.

St Paul urged hospitality to and by his co-workers and their communities. This extended to his call for the communities to financially support the Christian community in Jerusalem when they were experiencing famine. His communities welcomed pagans, and his church leaders, like Lydia offered their homes for church gatherings and Eucharist. In Romans 12:13, Paul calls for the members to *“contribute to the needs of the believers and seek to show hospitality”* (Romans 12:13). The Greek word Paul uses for hospitality is *philozenia*) which means affection towards strangers.

In Peter 4:8-10 we read, "Most of all, love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything. Be quick to give a meal to the hungry, a bed to the homeless – cheerfully. Be generous with the different things God gave you."

The letter to the Hebrews says, *“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares”* (Hebrews 13:2)

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke describes an encounter between Peter and a Roman centurion, who became the first pagan convert to Christianity. Through a series of visions and the subsequent encounter, Peter declares, *“I have come to see that God has no favourites.”*

Peter adds, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection” (Acts 10: 28-29)

Welcoming strangers and offering hospitality is most clearly expressed in the judgment scene described in Matthew’s gospel. *“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.* (Matthew 25:35-40)

8. How would you describe the Christian vocation of hospitality and how can you live it better?

5. PFG’s & hospitality

Just as hospitality is integral to Christian life, it is particularly a hallmark of Passionist Family Groups. It involves being both host and guest. We need to be attentive to what each role requires of us. At the same time, it is important that we encourage hospitality above entertainment.

Hospitality can involve setting a table that makes everyone feel comfortable. It chooses a menu that allows face-to-face time with guests instead of being chained to the kitchen. Pot luck gatherings make this easier. Hospitality doesn't need to feel our house has to be 'right' or in 'perfect order. Hospitality allows a gathering to be shaped by the quality of the conversation rather than the food. Hospitality shows interest in the thoughts, feelings, experiences, and preferences of those gathered. It is good at asking questions and listening intently to answers. Hospitality focuses attention on others. It helps create family.

Entertaining obsesses over what went wrong. Hospitality remembers and gives thanks for what was shared. □ After entertaining, a person might say, "It was nothing, really!" Hospitality thinks it was nothing. Really! Jen Wilkin recommends that □ "Entertaining seeks to impress; Hospitality seeks to bless".

Sometimes it can be more difficult to receive than to give. Receiving makes us vulnerable, whereas giving allows us to feel in control. Until we experience and admit this, we are likely to remain unable to understand why so many people are reluctant receivers. Some won't join a group, others won't accept an invitation. Some feel they could never match what others do or what they have. If this feeling of competition is allowed to develop within a family (PFG) participation will lessen. A night of fish and chips wrapped in newsprint is a great equalizer – anyone can eat that or serve that.

Most people live ordinary lives, and they can be reached by ordinary people. We just have to invite people round and let them know that it's nothing special – other than they are contributing to it! There is no need to think of complex PFG functions to organise – just open your home! Remember Jesus included in his call, to invite the poor; the ones who can't repay you. The call is to 'reach out'. If we can't begin to do that easily and naturally in our PFG, how can we do it within the wider community?

We have to keep learning about meals and hospitality. If you want to understand another person or their worldview, don't read a book. Talk to them, eat with them, be at home with them. Meals create natural opportunities to endorse the message that we are a (gospel) family. We are not "just social". Chef and theologian, Simon Holt says, "Whatever it looks like, your own table is a sacred place and one that is just as implicated by the lavish nature of God's grace as any other."

Holt also says, "*It's good to be reminded that the table is a very ordinary place, a place so routine and everyday it's easily overlooked as a place of ministry, and hospitality which lies at the heart of Christian mission, is a very ordinary thing; it's not rocket science nor is it terribly glamorous. Yet it is the very ordinariness of the table and of the ministry we exercise there that makes these elements of Christian life so important to the mission of the church. Most community hospitality will go unnoticed and unrecognized. At base, hospitality is about providing a space for God's Spirit to move. Setting a table, cooking a meal and washing the dishes provides a context in which people feel loved and welcome and where God's Spirit can be at work in their lives. Hospitality is a very ordinary business, but in its ordinariness is its real worth.*"

Modern technology is one of the biggest hurdles to us getting together. It can be great for spontaneous activities, where a quick text can communicate an idea far and wide. But what of the people on the outside, and there are some in every PFG? They joined, but they've never been brought into the heart of the group.

They never receive the hospitality of a personal visit from anyone in the group; just a text from someone who is for all intents and purposes, anonymous. No wonder they don't turn up. Would you? Let's face up to this challenge as a fundamental failure in hospitality. It's true we are busy, but hospitality calls for reaching out and making others feel welcome and special. You can't do that by text unless you know them very well.

PFG meals should be opportunities for encounter and this is often better when the gatherings are small. Ten years of gatherings with sixteen people might lead to a lot of pleasant times, but if those people had spent one gathering each year with just five others, they would all know each other so much better. If there are sixteen people, each of them has a relationship with 15 others; that's 240 relationships! If there are six people; each has a relationship with 5 others; that's still 30 relationships. Why not make it easier to make people feel comfortable and have some smaller gatherings on the same night, or as an extra once a year? That would be an act of genuine hospitality.

It's true we want to have fun, but genuine hospitality is more important than entertainment. Often we hear people say, "make yourself at home". This can be a nice line, but we have to think about what we need to do, to have people feel that. We can reflect on our own experiences. Who has made us feel at home, and what did they do that facilitated this? What do we need to do so that people can really feel 'at home'.

Let us seek to bless!

9. What do you want to remember most, after a meal or gathering and what would help achieve this?

10. How can you remind yourself and others that a meal together is a sacred encounter – to bless, not impress?

11. How can our mission of hospitality reach out to those in our PFG who rarely attend get-togethers?

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