

13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, 28 June 2020

Scriptures: 2Kings4:8-11,14-16; Rom.6:3-4,8-11; Matt.10:37-42

Homily: Fr. Ken

No one would claim that there is a simple solution to the issue of mass migration; yet few could remain unmoved by the desperation that leads people to leave their homes and take their families on such perilous journeys. The issue of just how welcoming to be is one which many host nations grapple with. The scale of mass migration is especially challenging for countries that pride themselves on being liberal democracies with a long tradition of welcoming people who are poor and oppressed. The quality of our welcome—or lack of welcome—is making many take a hard look at their core values and their self-understanding.

The Letter to the Hebrews tells us: “Remember always to welcome strangers, for by doing this, some people have entertained angels without knowing it”. From Abraham and Sarah onwards, the scriptures show how people who extend hospitality to strangers are often the ones who actually end up receiving the hospitality of God. In the first reading for today, the prophet Elisha wants to give some kind of recompense to the unnamed woman who is so generous in her welcome to the holy man and his companion. She declines his offer saying that she has everything she needs. Her generosity is not given for any hope of reward but simply as an expression of her kindness, of the sort of person that she is. However, the prophet is able to promise her the one thing that she truly desires: the gift of a son. In the Gospel, Jesus intensifies this teaching on the importance of welcome and hospitality. Christ identifies so closely with his disciples that he states that anything done to help them will be regarded as done to him personally—even something as trivial as offering a cup of water. And by welcoming him, we welcome the Creator who sent him. God is never outdone in hospitality. We give different names to that hospitality: salvation,

eternal life, wholeness, healing, mercy, redemption, forgiveness, holiness. These are ways in which we experience the hospitality of God. Always, when we welcome God into our lives—in our prayer, in our service of others, in faithfulness to our calling—we find ourselves blessed, enriched by that encounter.

Pope Francis has made the idea of hospitality central to his ministry. His very first trip after becoming Pope was to the Italian island of Lampedusa to visit the migrants who were risking their lives crossing the Mediterranean in search of a better life. He has constantly spoken of the importance of welcoming those in need—saying Christians are people who build bridges to welcome others, not walls to keep them out. Last year, in his message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis stated that the issue of mass migration is “not just about migrants” themselves, but that “it’s about all of us”—confronting us with our fears and prejudices, challenging our sense of solidarity, probing the quality of our love and our faith. It makes us face who we really are.

In many small and countless ways, it is God’s very self who is the visitor in our daily lives. For when we welcome strangers, feed people who are hungry, clothe those who are naked, visit those who are sick or imprisoned—then it is Christ himself whom we are welcoming. And we are inevitably changed by that encounter. We become more compassionate, more willing to serve, more ready to turn away from our sin, more gentle, more open to life, more able to listen, to pray, to love. In short, we become more like the God we welcome. Such hospitality is not simply sacred—it is life-giving both for us and for those we welcome.