

HOSPITALITY OF THE HEART

by Jean Glaraton

My years spent working with a community of Benedictine Sisters offered me ample exposure to the commonly accepted definition of hospitality: the friendly and generous reception of visitors; an act of social grace; a smile; a warm welcome to an expected guest. They simply oozed hospitality. More impactful, though, was my introduction to St. Benedict's belief that everyone we encounter—the poor, the unexpected, the curious, the other—is to be received with genuine acceptance and an open mind and heart, no matter their current situation.

In *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily*, Joan Chittister, OSB describes Benedictine hospitality as a spiritual act, a holy event, giving from our whole selves, not just our “extras.” It's not *what* we share of ourselves, but *that* we are sharing, *real sharing*. Along with the sharing comes listening. By letting other in, our vision of the world is stretched, and we have opportunities to ask ourselves what knowledge and insight might come to our lives through our various encounters.

Chittister speaks of a Benedictine heart as a place without boundaries, a point where all the differences of the world meet and melt. Benedictine hospitality—hospitality of the heart—is the way we come out of ourselves, with our minds, hearts, lives, talents, and hands open. Done well, it is to be practiced daily with a *recklessly generous heart*.

It was in the comfort and safety of the monastery that I began to confront my own personal barriers of fear and prejudice, issues that were preventing me from understanding the challenges faced by those I thought of as “others,” those somehow “less than.” As I did so, I began to realize the truth of Chittister's words, that hospitality of the heart can change a world of potential enemies into a world of potential friends. And what a beautiful world that would be. With daily practice, we will get there!

“All guests welcomed as Christ” (Rule of Benedict 53)

These words are an invitation to reflect on the presence of Christ in each person.

“...the presence of Christ in each person.”

How do you live your life in a way that reflects belief in the presence of Christ in each person?

How can (or do) you practice hospitality of the heart? What barriers must you confront?

“God may have sent that one for that very reason” (Rule of Benedict 61)

Think about the people whose lives have crossed paths with yours, those who are part of your daily life, and those who are not. Who has God sent you “for that very reason?”

Hospitable God,

Open my heart, that I might recognize the presence of Christ in all I meet.

Open my mind, that I might understand the reason You sent that one.

Help me move past barriers about “the other,” that I might see them as potential friends.

In Your name, I pray. Amen.

