

*No man is an island* the poet John Donne tells us and the readings today teach us about the necessity of relationship in our lives. If we live alone in the world, we cannot flourish because our nature needs others for us to be who we are: it is as if others hold up a mirror to our lives and teach us about our very being. The ultimate mirror is that belonging to God, for as many of the mystical saints of the church will teach us, it is in the discovery of God that we reflect a real understanding of who we are.

The scriptures today reveal how we are to be welcoming and generous in our dealings with others. The theologian Karl Rahner tells us that *the one who comes into our presence is a messenger of grace*. Put like that, we can see the generosity of Abraham and Sarah and their unusual visitors and that of Mary and Martha welcoming Jesus shows a generosity of spirit that allows for relationship to flourish. When we offer food to another, what we are offering to that person is life itself, because when we offer food, we say to the person "you will not be hungry tomorrow" and you will live. The encounters in the scriptures show us the importance of feeding visitors physically, but we must not forget that nourishment takes many forms.

In the case of Abraham and Sarah, both engage in the preparation of the meal: both allow the visitor to rest and enter into their home. It would seem as if they are offering generosity to the strange guest, but in the final reckoning, Abraham receives a generous promise -a son. This fulfils the word spoken by the Lord to him that he would be the Father of a great nation.

In the home of Mary and Martha, they offer Jesus respite during a difficult period of his ministry. We see Mary devoutly listening to the word of Jesus, sitting attentively to him and being with him. We also see the industrious Martha in the kitchen, pottering around preparing the food for the eating. We all know this scenario: those who sit and listen and those who are the "doers" in the background. No doubt both recognise the need for the food, and we can sympathise with the indignant Martha who asks Jesus to intervene in what could be seen as a sibling dispute; but it is Martha who is denying herself the gift of God in front of her, Mary recognises her need to hear the Words of Jesus and enter into a relationship with him; and the guest becomes the one who "feeds" Mary and desires to "feed" Martha with his teaching.

If I were to say that these readings tell us of sacrifice, we can begin to draw out an important thread. Whenever we welcome anyone into our lives or homes, we make a sacrifice: we give of our time and our space, but more importantly we give of ourselves so we can enter into a relationship with the guest. Recognising the reliance we have on God to reveal our very selves to us so we can see him more clearly in our lives is central. It is not about being on our knees all the time, but of making God part of our every moment. We have to find our place in God's life, not find a place for God in ours.

And so we can see now the importance of baptism in the Christian journey. At a first glance, like the readings, it is the parents bringing their child to be baptised that is the visible act, but underneath is the deeper understanding of the election of this child by God. From the moment of her creation, by a unique thought of God himself, God has desired for this child to be completely his. He elected her and now her parents are responding to that election: baptism claims this child as God's own and configures her heart towards virtue, holiness and grace. But the seed of faith planted in baptism requires constant care and nurture: this child will grow in holiness through her relationship with God and with others. She must choose the better part of sitting at the feet of Jesus just as we make that choice. In doing so, we will grow aware of who we are and what we are to be in the world. We will not be an island, but become the glory of God: a human being fully alive.