For Personal Reflection

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1. Am I a welcoming person?
2. Do I welcome God into all of my life, not just some of it?
3. How welcoming am I to others?
4. Do I only welcome those whom I like?
5. How good am I at welcoming people whom I experience as difficult, bothersome or unpleasant?
6. Is my ability and willingness to extend hospitality dictated solely by my feelings?
7. Who are the people in my life most in need of welcoming right now?
8. In what areas of my life am I most in need of hospitality right now?
9. How gracious am I in accepting the hospitality of others?

Further Reading

Touching the Holy: Ordinariness, Self-Esteem and Friendship. Robert J. Wicks. Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1992.

The 7 Secrets of Successful Catholics. Paul Wilkes. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1998.

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Divine Hospitality

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SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

Our doorbell rang one day. I peered out and saw that it was a man whom had lied to us in the past: I found it very difficult to deal with him. I did not want to answer the door because I didn't know what to say to him. Sister Mary Margaret suggested that I say, "Hello, Jesus."

I knew she was right. I prayed for the faith that would enable me to welcome Jesus incarnated in that person. Perhaps that man was unaware of his union with Jesus and so he did not act accordingly, but someone has to recognize that for him. If I did not see Jesus in him, who would?

There was a Visitation sister in St. Louis who had a nursemaid when she was a child: the nursemaid's name was Lulu. Years later, while visiting Lulu in a nursing home, the sister recalled how difficult she had been while growing up. Old Lulu declared, "Oh yes, but I loved you just as if you were good."

"Our natural liking makes hospitality easier, but we must learn to love and welcome all just as if they were good."

Its one thing to welcome the people we like. It is an altogether different matter to welcome everyone that whom we encounter.

Jesus' hospitality is our model: "Come to me all you who hunger and you will find rest." Jesus is offering not necessarily food but much more: the bread that is Himself. Jesus offers hospitality when it convenient and inconvenient. Jesus offers hospitality to those who are sinners as well as to saints, to his friends and his foes.

Jesus' table fellowship was one of the hallmarks of his ministry and it scandalized many, for he ate with publicans and sinners. He was INCLUSIVE. After all, God makes it rain on the good and the bad alike.

"If anyone says, 'I love God' while hating one's brother or sister, that person is a liar. If one does not love one's brother or sister whom one sees, it cannot be that that person loves God whom one has not seen." (1 Jn. 4:24). We could add, "If one does not welcome the neighbor seen, how can we claim to welcome the God unseen?"

"Make your home in me as I make mine in you" is an amazing statement of Jesus about the MUTUALITY of being hospitable to God and God to us. Jesus is knocking at the door of our hearts: do we open our hearts to His?

Jesus calls us to the same kind of mutual hospitality by telling us that in welcoming others we are welcoming him. "Whatsoever you do to the least of these you do to me." (Mt. 25:40)

The mystery of the Visitation is a model of what each of us can be, and a symbol of what the church should be. Mary, having just heard and accepted the angel's message in faith, made space within herself for this unexpected person to whom she would give her flesh and blood as nourishment. She pondered (contemplative hospitality) as she made her way to visit her cousin Elizabeth. That blessed meeting of receiving and being received, of ministering and being ministered to, seems so mutual. In this same way the mystery of the Visitation is a symbol of the Church and its ministry in the Reign of God. It is about making space for little ones, the unexpected; nourishing them with the Body and the Blood of Jesus; then reaching out to others in mutual love and praising God together and calling each other to justice.

"'Make your home in me as I make mine in you' is an amazing statement of Jesus about hospitality and mutuality."

Hospitality begins inside. We must be gentle, accepting and loving towards ourselves, befriending those parts of ourselves that we do not like and learning to respect ourselves for who we are: beloved children of God.

To the extent that we focus on embodying this welcoming spirit of the living God in relation to ourselves and others, we are living at what is known in the Salesian tradition as the "high point of the soul." We are called to live at the fine point of our soul and spirit, loving and welcoming despite what we may be feeling about others, or even ourselves, in any given moment.

Hospitality is participating in the work of a God who is often unseen and unfelt . The inconstancy of our souls is blown about by the winds of passion and therefore always unsteady. But we always have the freedom and power, available through God's grace, to welcome others graciously and openly, regardless of how we may feel about them: this is part of what "Living Jesus" is all about.

We must be aware of our assumed superiority, of believing that our own ways of feeling, thinking and acting are always the right way (or the only way!); and that others seem stupid, crude, or unreasonable. We have to set aside layer after layer of superficiality (our degrees, training, positions, roles, ethnicity, cultures and other accidental parts of us) to enter more deeply into the core of our own existence. It is here where we can truly say, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal 2:20)

"The inconstancy of our souls is blown about by the winds of passion and therefore always unsteady."

Salesian spirituality is relational. What goes on between persons is the essence of making Jesus live. One finds God precisely through and with persons. Hence, hospitality isn't about doing something nice or extra for others: it is, in truth, a concrete way of practicing the peace and justice of the Triune God, of being ourselves something of Divine welcoming for others.

Each of us is the incarnation of God. Jesus shows us how to practice hospitality. At his resurrection he clothed himself in several guises: a gardener, a pilgrim, a fisherman. Today we see his resurrected presence extended a billion fold. Do we welcome Jesus today as an man, a woman, an old person, a teenager, a politician, a business owner, a homeless person, an athlete, an introvert or extrovert, a deaf, blind, or mentally retarded person, married, divorced, gay or lesbian, incarcerated, addicted, poor, wealthy, educated, illiterate, black, white? Each is a personal self living inside an outer appearance. Welcome each one and say "Hello, Jesus!"

Remember: Divine hospitality is for everyone...not simply for a favorite few.