

18th August 2020

Hospitality

“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”

Bible, Hebrews 13:2

Our kitchen is finished and it's looking good! I hope we have happy times offering hospitality in our new kitchen just as we did in the old one.

The word "hospitality" comes from the Latin *hospes*, meaning "host". (Interestingly, *hospes* itself has roots in *hostis*, meaning "stranger" or "enemy", from which terms like "hostile" come.) A *hospital* was a guest-chamber for travellers at an inn. And from this you get hospice, hostel and hotel. Medieval abbeys always had a hospital as part of their complex of buildings, not for sick people, but as a place of hospitality, particularly on a pilgrim route. "Hospitality", therefore, is about welcoming strangers. In Celtic cultures it also carried with it the idea of protection. A host who granted a person's request for refuge was expected to provide food and shelter, *and* to make sure the guest didn't come to harm.

Louis de Jaucourt, an 18th century French scholar, describes hospitality in *Encyclopédie* as "the virtue of a great soul that cares for the whole universe through the ties of humanity". Even the smallest act of welcome and protection, from a medieval abbey to a modern kitchen, "cares for the whole universe" because we are part of one humanity.

But "hospitality" doesn't need to be in a physical place. It's about attitude, how we engage with people. Can a smile to a stranger, rather than avoiding eye-contact, not be a welcome from a host to a guest? Is the "Black Lives Matter" movement not based on the need for everyone to be aware of, and hospitable to, some who may be perceived as strangers, or even enemies? When hospitality becomes an attitude of mind and not just a physical process, everyone benefits. And, as the writer of Hebrews suggests, that could possibly be an angel you've just smiled at, and you could well have had an angel smiling back at you ...

A prayer for today

Welcoming God, you are my host and I am your guest, fed, nurtured, safe in your presence. May I, therefore, become your host to strangers and enemies around me, that they might, through my hospitality, know they are your guests too. Amen

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