

A-13 OT

In her cookbook, *Extending the Table*, Joetta Handrich Schlabach combines recipes and stories from around the world. She includes an account of visiting a village in southern Africa. After being offered the best food in a poor family's home, she notes a contrast with the developed world. "The more affluent we become, the less hospitable we are." She attributes this to our busyness; we feel that unless everything is in order we cannot receive guests. The plethora of magazines and books on lavish entertaining only exacerbates our feelings of inadequacy.

Sometimes we become so absorbed with life that we fail to develop our full potential and talents as human beings; we can become so obsessed with creating and maintaining a lifestyle that we do not live a life worth living. Christ calls all who would be disciples to "lose" life's obsessive, meaningless and petty pursuits in order to "find" a life fully human and alive in hope and joy.

The theme of hospitality is reflected in today's first reading and gospel. In the Ancient world, hospitality was not merely a point of etiquette; it was a requirement for survival in a dangerous world. There were no general stores, and travelers depended upon the goodwill of others for food, shelter and necessary supplies while they were on a journey. Some people even believed that divine beings roamed the earth in search of examples of human graciousness: "Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some unknowingly entertained angels" (Heb. 13:2).

The story of the Shunamite woman feeding Elisha and then seeing to it that he had his own room is a metaphor for welcoming and entertaining God's word and making it a source of grace and life.

Jesus instructs his followers on the need for hospitality, "Whoever receives you receives me." Jesus lived in a world in which one's worth was determined by one's social status. He did not want his disciples to be caught up in such concerns. His followers were to be unassuming, like unimportant children. We are now people whose value is not determined by social status. We are people who extend openhearted Christian hospitality to others, knowing that it is not merely angels whom we might be entertaining. Rather it is Jesus himself along with the one who sent him.

You don't have to be materially rich in order to be hospitable as is noted in today's scripture readings. All we need is a kind and generous heart that is open to everyone and anyone.