

16th Sunday (C)

- Some years ago I happened to meet a man who had fallen upon particularly hard times.
- He had been a very successful engineer in a huge multi-national company & had moved with his job from England to Australia with his family.
- He developed cancer & had to undergo treatment over many months during which he lost his job & then his family left him.
- As you can imagine, he was devastated & was drawn to return to Church – the last time he'd been on a regular basis as a young adult, it was still in Latin.
- He'd come to Mass a few times & found much peace during those times.
- It was after one of those times that I met him & he told me his story.
- But I'd noticed in a few weeks that he hadn't come back.
- I happened to run into him in the supermarket where he informed me that even though he loved coming to Mass, he felt very much alone & abandoned when at the end of Mass, everyone went their separate ways & no one apart from me had talked with him.
- The Pentecostals down the road had found out about him & welcomed him warmly – they offered him hospitality.
- He didn't bear any resentment against us, but we didn't offer him what he most needed at that time – to belong. ++++++
- I am sure by now you are all aware that in the scheme of readings presented to us in the Lectionary the first reading & the Gospel are usually connected or linked in their content.
- This is nowhere clearer than today where the common theme is that of hospitality.
- God visits Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre in the form of three angels.
- Abraham makes them very welcome & he & Sarah prepare a generous meal, making a large quantity of loaves & killing a calf.
- God responds to this generosity by predicting that within a year Sarah would have a son.
- The lesson is clear that welcoming the stranger always brings a blessing.
- This stress on hospitality is an important theme in the Bible & indeed in the Christian life.
- Besides being an important moment in our salvation history this marvellous account of the appearance of God at the Oaks of Mamre helps us to understand that God often comes to us in disguise.
- God often comes as a stranger, as a traveller, as someone who needs something from us.
- The question we have to ask is whether we are the sort of person who makes the stranger welcome.
- Of course, this is a challenge we are presented with each day of our lives.

- Each stranger could be Christ himself.
- But it is also a challenge we are faced with as a parish, most obviously in the case of visitors & new people who come to live among us.
- Do we make them welcome or do we just brush past them as we leave the Church & leave them to fend for themselves?
- In today's first reading & Gospel there is something poignant said about leaving space in our lives where we can encounter God & allow God to extend his hospitality to us, enabling him to do some remarkable things in our lives – as Abraham & Sarah did & as Mary did in the gospel.
- Like Martha, we can be annoyed with interruptions – people who break-in on my comfort or routine or on the things I have to get done, but God is often **the** interrupter who breaks into the story of my life or my day – & he can disarm us.
- It is the Spirit who tries to break in – & the Spirit acts as a gift & a threat that disarms us.
- And we can be warring against the Spirit if we try to keep on going as if all is well, when in fact there is need to attend to something in my life – an opportunity for change that involves growth.
- The question is what space do we leave for God; what space do we leave for other people – are we really present to them?
- Today's gospel is sometimes portrayed as a dichotomy between action & reflection.
- Many within the Christian tradition adopt the Martha approach of responding to Christ through service & action while others see Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus as a model for contemplation & reflection.
- The two different models have developed quite distinctly in the history of the Church & it has to be said that the 'Martha' approach of service & action has been prominent for some time.
- However, action that is not grounded in prayerful reflection runs the risk of becoming well-intentioned busy-ness.