

Hospitality Reflects God's Goodness



Christopher News Notes

“All guests...are to be welcomed like Christ.”—Rule of St. Benedict

GO TO ANY SUPERMARKET, OR FLIP THROUGH YOUR TV STATIONS, and you will find a multitude of media dedicated to beautiful houses: how to buy them, renovate them, or decorate them. It is, of course, natural to desire a beautiful home where we can host our friends and family. But how about when a beautiful home, or a clean home, becomes more important than being open to others?

Scripture tells us that we “must be hospitable, a lover of goodness” (Titus 1:8). Are we tempted to postpone our call to Christian charity when the living room clutter is overwhelming or our cooking leaves a little to be desired?

Finding Good “in the Mess”

Husband and wife team Chip and Joanna Gaines have won over many hearts through the years with their HGTV show *Fixer Upper*, keeping viewers delighted with their cheerful, goofy humor and emphasis on family. As parents of five small children, Chip and Joanna are no strangers to the chaos that can ensue within four walls! “I always thought that ‘thriving’ would come when everything was perfect, and what I learned is that it’s actually in the mess that things get good,” writes Joanna in *The Magnolia Story*.

The magazine articles we read surely don’t help debunk the myth that everything must be perfect before we invite people into our homes. Who would have someone over for coffee when the trim in their guest bathroom is peeling, and looks nothing like the serene spa-like sanctuaries acclaimed on HGTV? What if your hand towels have faded rubber duckies embroidered on them, and have been through their 300th wash? The truth of the matter is, if we wait until we have a perfect house to invite people over, we may be alone for a long time.

Having company over is almost a parallel to the spiritual life. If we hesitate to invite God into our lives until everything is clean, or until we have all of our problems in order, then we are going to be in danger of living an empty, joyless life. Jesus wants to be in our hearts now, mess and all!

In the same way, it is dangerous to put off human relationships until everything is orderly. We have to be careful not to let the pursuit of perfection in our homes, in our kids’ manners, in our cooking, keep us from allowing others into the heart of our homes. Instead, let’s focus on the living, breathing human souls in front of us.

Five Simple Ways to Reach Out to Others

“If being open toward others doesn’t come naturally to you,” writes Elizabeth Manneh at *Busted Halo*, “then cultivating a practice of hospitality may take time and patience. But you’ll be rewarded with happy memories, deepening friendships, and also by knowing that your hospitality has helped someone else experience God’s love in action.”

- 1. Start small**—“Hospitality can be as basic as inviting someone over for coffee or tea,” Elizabeth writes. “Serve some tasty treats or fancy cookies, fragrant coffee, or special tea blend...These special touches will make your guest feel honored.”
- 2. Cook a meal together**—“Inviting others for a meal doesn’t mean you have to do all the work. Why not prepare your meal together? Nothing builds a friendship like working together in the kitchen, and it also makes the conversation flow more easily if you’ve got tasks to distract you.”
- 3. Food isn’t compulsory**—Hospitality doesn’t have to involve food, Elizabeth advises: “Shared interests are a good way to practice hospitality. Start your own book club and take turns leading the discussion each week.” She also suggests a craft group, such as knitting, quilting or workshops to “learn new skills.”
- 4. Get out and about**—“Hospitality doesn’t only mean inviting people into your home. Getting together with others for a regular hike, hanging out in the park, urban exploration, or fishing are also ways to open yourself to others.”
- 5. Offer small acts of kindness**—“At its simplest, hospitality can be a quick, thoughtful act done on the spur of the moment,” Elizabeth reminds us. “Offering a homeless person a hot drink with an encouraging word could make all the difference in their day. Share some cut flowers from your backyard with a sick friend or take a homemade cake to your new neighbors.”

This call to show love through food and hospitality has deep spiritual implications. Romans 12:13, for instance, states, “Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.”

“When the biblical writers talk about hospitality, they’re not talking about slaughtering a fatted calf for every person who comes calling...or laying out a fancy spread of artisanal cheeses and imported olives,” writes Emily Stimpson Chapman. “What they’re talking about is simply opening the doors of our homes and inviting others in—giving the lonely, the lost, the weak, the hungry, the struggling, the searching, the stranger, and the friend an opportunity to experience the love of God through the love we show to them.”

In her blog post “The ABCs of Hospitality,” written for the St. Paul Center, Chapman says that “for

Christians, feeding guests isn’t about proving our own generosity; it’s a participation in God’s generosity. He gives us good gifts, and we thank Him for that by sharing good gifts with others.”

This, says Chapman, parallels with the gift of the Eucharist: “Similarly, God shows His love for us by feeding us with His Body and Blood, and we can show our love for others by feeding them with a good risotto and nice Bordeaux. Every meal we serve is an opportunity to show others that they matter, that they are important, that they are worth every minute spent stirring, chopping, and basting.”

Christine is a mother of 12 children who lives in rural Michigan. She always hesitated to reach out to people in her church to come over because the habits of her energetic teenage sons weren’t always conducive to a fresh-smelling and tidy house.

But then she noticed a young woman sitting alone in the pews during Sunday Mass. Christine remembered that her own younger sister had been taken under the wing of a big family when she moved to a new town. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Christine invited the woman, Elizabeth, to breakfast. She told Elizabeth with a laugh, "I can't promise it won't be crazy, but at least you won't be bored." Elizabeth is now like a member of the family, and joins right in on all the crazy, messy fun. "I can't imagine not having her in our lives," says Christine.

Hospitality Outside the Home

You don't have to own a home to practice hospitality. It can be as simple as inviting someone into your group of friends. For example, the students at Dayton Consolidated School in Maine went that extra mile to make a new classmate, six-year-old girl Morey Belanger, feel loved.

As reported by Lauren Kent for *CNN*, Morey is the school's first deaf child, so educators embraced the opportunity to teach all the students some sign language. Kids have learned how to sign more than 20 words, including colors, letters and words related to classes. "Morey helped all of them to learn the alphabet," said school Principal Kimberly Sampietro. "The kids have just really embraced her. They look up to her, they want her around, and they want to partner with her."

"I absolutely feel like it makes her feel welcomed," said Morey's mom, Shannon Belanger. What

makes this more beautiful? Even though the students were the ones trying to make Morey feel welcome, Morey opened a whole new world for them, too. "All the kids feel excited that they know another language, and I think they think it's fun," explained Shannon.

Hospitality is also extended when we share our God-given talents with others. Consider Massimo Bottura, who has an impressive résumé. He was voted the number one chef in the world in 2016, he owns multiple restaurants, and has starred in several TV shows. But most impressive is Bottura's commitment to charity, inspired by the women in his life, writes Theresa Civantos Barber for *Aleteia*.

In 2015, Bottura began "Food for Soul," a non-profit organization for the poor and homeless in Milan. Barber explains: "Famous chefs cook the meals, and they use food ingredients that were deemed unsuitable for sale in supermarkets and otherwise would have been thrown away. These soup kitchens are called *refettorios*, or 'refectories' in English, after the rooms in monasteries where monks gather to share their daily meal. The goal is for these centers to offer a monastic spirit of peaceful restoration and warm welcome to guests."

Bottura says he wanted the homeless to "enjoy the pleasure of a beautiful meal in a beautiful place." Eventually, word of this service to the homeless reached the Pope's ear, via the Catholic charity, Caritas. Refettorio was given a permanent place in the town of Greco, partnering with a parish priest. "The Refettorio concept caught on and has been spreading around the world."


"It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

A non-profit, founded in 1945 by Father James Keller, M.M., The Christophers encourages people to change the world for the better. Donations are tax-deductible. News Notes are published 10 times a year. Single copies are free.

Editor-in-Chief: Tony Rossi

The Christophers

5 Hanover Square, New York, NY 10004
212-759-4050 • 888-298-4050

mail@christophers.org • www.christophers.org

Christopher News Note 630

ISBN: 8755-69601

"Hospitality is the virtue which allows us to break through the narrowness of our own fears and to open our houses to the stranger, with the intuition that salvation comes to us in the form of a tired traveler. Hospitality makes anxious disciples into powerful witnesses, makes suspicious owners into generous givers, and makes close-minded sectarians into interested recipients of new ideas and insights."

—Henri Nouwen in "Ministry and Spirituality"