

## **Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, June 28, 2026**

I could be wrong, but I think most priests have sort of a positive outlook on humanity. Maybe that's because people are on their best behavior when the priest is around. When the priest walks into the room people start watching their language and stuff like that. So, perhaps priests have rose colored glasses. We don't know what reality is really like. But we also see the confessional. So, things even out a little bit.

The theme of hospitality and welcome is present in today's readings, especially the First Reading and the Gospel. I was thinking about that dynamic because I experienced welcome when I go to different parishes. I felt very welcome here from the very beginning and in all my parishes I served. Sometimes I think is that just because I am a priest, or is the community really this warm and welcoming? And I don't know. I hope so. I hope it is mainly because the community is warm and welcoming. But I do hear from various people in the parishes where I have served, a lot of people say, "You know, I love it here. I felt welcome from day one. People are always, you know, saying hello, and all of that." I have also spoken to people who have said, "I have not felt welcome." And thanks be to God; their faith urges them to keep going to Mass. But they do not always feel a strong connection. They don't feel like they have been received with open arms. And I don't know why that is. I don't know why some people and not others are welcomed, but if anything, I guess, it does show us that we can always improve in being more and more welcoming to everyone. Not just to say 'hello' to the people who have arrived here, but to go out and to communicate to the people that are out there in the world that they would be welcome here. And

then to issue the invitation to let them discover that sense of welcome and belonging to a community.

As I said, a lot of people who do not feel welcome can still come to Mass anyway because they know what's here. They know who is here. But the good Lord knows our human nature, too. He knows that we are much more inclined to participate somewhere where it's pleasant to be there. Where we feel welcome, where we feel loved and wanted and received. Jesus says, *"Whoever receives you, receives me, and wherever he receives me, receives the one who sent me."* And he speaks about receiving a prophet because he is a prophet, receiving the righteous man because he is a righteous man. And he's speaking to the apostles about how they are to go out and people receiving them will receive Jesus himself, too.

But it also implies, it is an instruction to us about the receiving of others, welcoming others, exercising hospitality. I think it's interesting that one of the beefs, I guess you could say, that the scribes and Pharisees had with Jesus was that he welcomed sinners. Go to Luke 15. They are complaining, they're crying, *"This man welcome sinners and eats with them!"* But Jesus is showing us that is how we ought to be. This whole town ought to say, "Those Catholics - they welcome sinners and eat with them. They welcome everyone. They call everyone to conversion, to change their heart, changing their life, but they welcome everyone."

So, I encourage you, in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead, to foster a spirit, a culture of invitation, and welcome so that this place, I mean, this place is already sort of bursting at the seams, but the place over there that was built to hold more people, would also

be bursting at the seams. Father Darren didn't build that church so that everyone could spread out a little bit more. We ought to fill that Church. And I said it several times before, but I'll say it again - there is only one or one and half percent of the population of Stevens County going to Mass on Sunday. There is a lot of potential for growth. Wouldn't it be great if there was such demand here that you had to talk to the bishop and say, "We need more priests up here." We already need more priests up here. [laughter] but to say, 'We need more Masses. We need more Masses because there's so many people that want to come to church and receive Jesus in the Eucharist.' Part of that is the culture of invitation, the culture of welcome so that anyone who comes here, anyone who meets you out there finds that spirit of welcome that dwells in the heart of Jesus Christ himself.

One of the reasons that we practice welcoming our neighbor is so that we learn how to welcome Jesus himself. And as we have the eyes to see, Jesus is in each person who is waiting to receive our welcome. And that is what this Christian life and ultimately, eternal life is all about - receiving, welcoming God into our life, welcoming Jesus, welcoming the Holy Spirit, allowing God in, into every part. Not just those parts we are proud of, not just the parts that we feel good about, but every part of our heart, every space within us. We want to welcome God there - places of shame, places of guilt, places of struggle - welcome the Lord right in there. He wants us to come in. He wants you to receive him there because he's going to transform you from within. He's not over there waiting for you to get your act together, and then he will come in. It is in his coming in that we will be transformed and we will become a saint. That is what he

wants. He wants you to want to receive him and be transformed by him in holiness and goodness.

So, a culture of invitation in our parish leads to the culture of invitation by which we receive the Lord as individuals and as a worshipping community, and in receiving the Lord truly transformed by him. So today, we might just name a little examination of where we are, each one, in our practice of hospitality. How welcoming are we? Not just here, but also out there. How well do we receive the other person - receiving Christ in them, welcoming Christ in them. We can identify some area where we can grow in that. Let us ask God for the grace to grow in that area. To be overwhelmingly welcoming; to be so warm and to be able to receive people with joy. You know, I do believe, and I pray that this place is going to grow, more, more, and more.

But everyone has their part just like the Shunamite woman, the woman of influence who welcomes Elisha. I was thinking that his accommodation sounds a little bit like what I'm going to at the seminary - a little room on the roof furnished with a bed, with a table, chair, and... I'll miss the rectory here. That little stream the backyard. [laughter] Anyway, she did her little part welcoming the man of God. We all do our little part in welcoming the stranger, welcoming the sinner, welcoming the traveler, welcoming the visitor, welcoming our family members, welcoming our coworkers. God works through all of that in extraordinary ways, as he has already been working through you and wants to work through you even more for his glory and for the salvation of souls.