

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini

**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord
Matthew 21:9**

Dear Ones,

We are coming up on the 7th Sunday of the Epiphany, which also means we're 10 days out from Ash Wednesday. In preparation for this holy time, I'd like to invite us into reflections of habitual attitudes of the heart that seeks to provide for the well being of 'the other' in concrete acts of kindness, consideration, and service, in both small and large ways.

In our vestry meeting this past week, I encouraged our vestry to attend the Bonheoffer and Beatitudes Evensong offering and consider reading/studying the works of the early desert monastic communities. The beginning text suggested was: **To Love as God Loves**, by Roberta C. Bondi, an oldie but goodie as some say. The Interim Rector's column today speaks of lessons learned from Benedict of Nursia, one of the best-known early monastics.

Benedict of Nursia (c.480-550), whose name itself means "blessed," was a layperson who became "a hermit at Subiaco, near Rome; moved to Monte Cassino and developed a close-knit community life whose written Rule has shaped monasticism and Anglican spirituality through the present day. Chapter 53 of the Rule of St. Benedict concerns "the reception of guests". Benedict wrote plainly: "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ." Joan Chittester comments, "*The message to the stranger is clear: Come right in and disturb our perfect lives. You are Christ for us today.*"

Radical hospitality in the Episcopal Church has its roots here in Benedict. It is one thing for us to be "welcoming", thoughtful and generous to others by allowing them into our lives on our terms. It is another thing entirely to practice hospitality in such a radical way that we expect to be disturbed and changed by those who come to our door...*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*. This 'hospitality' makes us vulnerable to God. Who is this we ask? Christ incarnate at our door!

This 'hospitality' is not, however, to be misunderstood as an achievement reserved only for monks and saints. And I wonder how would it change our lives together if this were our minimum practice of shaping community as followers of Christ? Chittester comments again:

"Benedict wants us to let down the barriers of our hearts so that this generation does not miss accompanying the innocent to Calvary as the last one did. Benedict wants us to let down the barriers of our souls so that the God of the unexpected can come in."

In other words Benedictine hospitality in our homes, workplaces, neighborhoods and churches would look like:

- Listen rather than speak;
- Offers rather than requires;
- Surrenders to the reality of the other person – rather than expecting them to be mirrors of ourselves;
- Welcome in such a way that we don't create guilt for what 'they' don't do; rather remind ourselves of the possibilities to meet Christ and be Christ when we open our doors and hearts even wider.

"Come right in and disturb our perfect lives. You are Christ for us today."