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Gifts of Compassion

Relationships that exemplify hospitality involve both giving and receiving. Welcoming one another in Jesus' name sets the stage for sacramental moments. We may encounter in another the presence of God. Another may experience in us the grace of Christ. We trust God to provide what will be needed.

Focus Scripture

Matthew 10:40–42

Additional Scriptures

Genesis 22:1–14

Psalms 13

Romans 6:12–23

Hospitable God, we offer thanks and praise for the welcome you extend in friendship and forgiveness. Guide us to welcome others through our relationships, our forgiving and accepting forgiveness. Help us grow in the joy of offering and receiving love. Amen.

Focus Scripture: Matthew 10:40–42

Our physical surroundings provide images that help us express God's relationship with us. Thus, in the arid regions of biblical Israel, water was both a precious commodity and a powerful symbol of life. Inhospitable terrain made hospitality more than a social pleasantry. Life depended on water and welcome. To give the gift of either was to extend a gift of compassion. To receive the gift of either was to experience grace. Matthew links water and welcome here to underscore that the presence of Christ may be revealed in basic acts of hospitality.

In the traditions of Jesus' time, a messenger was to be treated as if the messenger were the one who sent her or him. Therefore, to extend welcome to one of Jesus' disciples was equal with welcoming Jesus.

These verses in Matthew refer to acts of compassion extended toward "these little ones." Who are the little ones? Some commentators suggest the phrase identifies ordinary people within the church. Later in the gospel, Matthew 25:31–46 relates a parable where Jesus comes to us in the "least of these." There, too, we minister to Christ as we minister to the needs of others. We are the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

"Prophets" and "the righteous" are also identified in the focus reading. Tradition suggests that these terms refer to itinerant teachers and missionaries, for whom the hospitality of strangers would have been a necessity.

In Christian community, all leaders and "little ones" are valued. We rightly emphasize the importance of giving, and we also honour the gifts of all by humbling ourselves to receive. For in giving and receiving, we may experience the sacrament-like encounter of Christ in another.

This passage comes at the end of Matthew 10, which details the call, actions, and cost of discipleship. Hospitality is an important issue because the gospel is "on the move," and disciples are taking action in Christ's name. "Word and deed" has been a theme encountered before in Matthew, as it will be again. Hospitality is more than a word of greeting. Acts of compassion such as the gift of cold water meet the most essential of human needs. The gospel is proclaimed and embodied by those who bear the name of the Christ.

Compassion and God-given gifts weave through the additional scriptures. **Genesis 22:1–14** narrates the near-sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. God's deliverance there prompts the naming of that place: "God will provide." Abraham, like Paul, receives from God more than could ever have been imagined. **Romans 6:12–23** names the extraordinary providence of salvation as the "free gift of God." Where death seemed inevitable – for Paul, for Abraham – God provides for life. The lament of **Psalms 13** could be heard as the voice of a person waiting for such grace: whether in the gift of cold water, the gift of a son's life, or a father's sparing. Yet even in the waiting, there is trust in God's steadfast love.



Images of compassion, received and given, invite us to trust God's providence and grace. They urge us to welcome and tend to others. They beckon us to open ourselves to receive gifts of compassion brought by others. How do you practice giving – and receiving – such offerings of compassion? When have you encountered Christ in your relationships with others?

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