“Hospitality”
Thirteen Sunday In Ordinary Time 2017
Refection By: Deacon Paul V. Hursh

"And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple—amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward." (Matthew 10:42) The theme this week that runs through both the Gospel and the story of Elisha’s visit in the second book of Kings is hospitality. The age-old tradition of offering refreshment and comfort to visitors is something to consider today as we celebrate the anniversary of the founding of our nation.

As a nation of immigrants, it is good to recall the importance of welcoming and supporting those who have traveled far to start a new life. Most of our forefathers came to America because life was not great in their ancestral home. Many fled political upheaval, discrimination, or natural disaster and came for the liberty promised by a democracy founded on the principle that, "all men are created equal." Others came to enjoy the freedom of religion; to exercise the freedom to worship God as they chose in honor of God, as they understood God.

As our forefathers enjoyed these
new freedoms so we should share them with others and not only that but to extend a welcome that includes supporting their needs as they strive to get on their feet and pursue the American dream. As the newcomers strive to secure a place in America for themselves it invigorates these same freedoms for all of us. Part of the welcoming process is the acceptance of others who are unlike us, speak different languages and cherish different customs. These differences do not strain the fabric of our nation; rather this diversity enriches who we are. Out of the diversity of our history come such precious things as jazz music, a frontier spirit, and a can-do attitude to get ‘er done.

Perhaps if we can extend this kind of biblical hospitality to the strangers in our midst we too will reap the "righteous man's reward." (Matthew 10:41b) This is nothing less than, as in the case of Elisha the prophet, future generations, and progeny. In the case of Jesus, the reward of caring for one of these least ones is the inheritance of his Father's Kingdom. He specifically references welcoming the stranger. (Matthew 25: 31-46)

Many of us will be traveling out of town to relatives and friends or hosting out of town visitors this summer. Whether we extend a welcome to others or are recipients of hospitality we will do well to remember the traditions of our faith and the history of our nation (we or our forbearers) were all once strangers in a strange land. To this end, we should practice the Golden Rule – "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

The people who reach our shores have already borne much adversity, sacrifice, and loss of homeland. We can ease their suffering by standing with them and offering a hand-up, even if it means, "only offering a cup of cold water." The best symbol of this welcoming spirit is our Statue of Liberty, a gift from the country of France. On its pedestal is this poem by Emma Lazarus entitled The New Colossus.

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she  
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"