

# *Entertaining Angels unaware*

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## Readings

Old Testament Gn 18:1-15

Epistle Hebrews 13:1-2

The Gospel Luke 18:35-43

We have all heard of incidents of a mysterious helper appearing on a scene where there is a need for some urgent assistance or special skill. I read recently of a young mother with two small children in her car having to pullover in the midst of a snow blizzard so thick that she could not see and so icy as to make it dangerous for her to keep driving. She was filled with panic as the white snow bomb was enveloping her and the children but then realized someone was outside tapping on her car window. She lowered the window and there was a man thoroughly dressed for the conditions asking if she was alright. He had a properly equipped truck and in a

jiffy had hitched her car to it and towed her vehicle a few kilometres safely to their home. She was attending to the children and quickly noticed that without a word the man had already detached her car from the tow frame and driven off. She had no idea who he was, never having seen him before nor since. Without a shred of information about him, all she can think is that he was an angel.

The short point of this story is to recognize that God comes to us in our humanity via the agency of our humanity. The man might have been a divine visitor or a regular human being doing a good thing, but either way he was to the woman, an angel. An angel is a messenger in the true meaning of the term. God comes to us in the loving actions of others and the power of such actions to point us to God is made authentic when the messenger seeks no recognition. This tells us that bringing help to another person is the one and only reason for the action which is what you would conclude about the tow truck driver – and such selflessness we

can recognize as a core characteristic of God's love for us.

The other side of an event of angelic visitation is the response of the one visited. One would like to think that if the young mother had the opportunity she might have asked the man in for a plate of soup or some warmth by a fire with a cuppa. Remember that the writer to Hebrews has the view that we ought to treat everyone with good quality hospitality because for all we know the other person might indeed be an angel.

*Do not neglect hospitality, because through it some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Heb 13:1-2)*

Clearly this writer believed that God's love comes to us in our human experiences via the actions of others, so how we respond to the other person's kindness is the litmus test of how we ourselves as Christ followers, should be to others.

How was Abraham to his 3 mysterious visitors ? He became aware of them as they were some distance away because he hurried perhaps running, to meet them. They must have impressed him as people of status – perhaps by their clothing, because he was humble before them and without knowing who they were or what their purpose was he offered them the very best of hospitality that he could. This would have taken some time because the welcome, preparation and cooking of the refreshments he offered involved the slaughter and preparation of a young calf for its tender meat. And he stood with them as they ate. So Abraham’s hospitality over the period of time must also have involved conversation and warm expressions of interest in the people as they spent time with him. Conversation is a sign of a generous heart towards strangers too – not just feeding and offering physical comfort, but offering a courteous relationship of trust and blessing as time is spent together.

It was when one of them mentions the promise of a son to be born to Sarah and that he the visitor would come back

when the child was born, that Abraham and his wife began to realize that the visitors were special when. This promise had previously been given to Abraham (ch 17) but perhaps not to Sarah who it is thought might have heard it for the first time. She laughed inwardly (18:12 – *she laughed to herself*). The event which began with the ordinary now becomes extraordinary.

If we are humble of heart and expectant, we can recognise God with us in the familiarity of a normal day. If we are disinterested and self absorbed then we are unlikely to see this and will not recognise God's hand at work. Later writers describe Abraham as a friend of God (see Is 41:8 & James 2:23). There might be a hint as to why he would be so described because clearly deep in his character was a desire to be like God to others. The way he treated his visitors was impeccable for its warm welcome and elaborate hospitality. It might have seemed natural to Abraham – because he was conscious of God's grace in his life, - to show grace to others. On this particular day Abraham *entertained angels unaware*. It is the nature of

God's commitment to us that the divine presence be apparent in the ordinary experiences of our daily life.

The good news of the Gospel releases us from the limitations of ourselves and the disabling poisons of our fallen nature that make our lives fraught from day to day, and instead gives to us the comforting assurance that Jesus is right there in our lives as our visitor and His presence will bring depth and meaning from day to day and - giving to us as He said - life more abundantly. That is a promise for the day.

The perfect fulfilment of God's grace coming to us in our humanity is of course in God's startling step to become one of us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The Risen Jesus is here with us and we don't need, like Abraham, to wonder and wait to know who our visitor is. Remember the promise of the Christ our visitor who stands at the door and knocks ... who when we open the door comes in and fellowships with us ( Rev 3:20).

In the Eucharist we are reminded of our God's loving presence as our divine visitor and are reminded of the depth of that love that endured the cross for our sakes. We need to be regularly and frequently reminded, fed and nourished by the richness of that love so that it can shape our lives enabling us to show such love to others.

*Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares*