



Hospitality: A balancing act of justice – Fr Charlò Camilleri, O.Carm

Generosity expresses a fundamental aspect of our interdependence

Community

Religion

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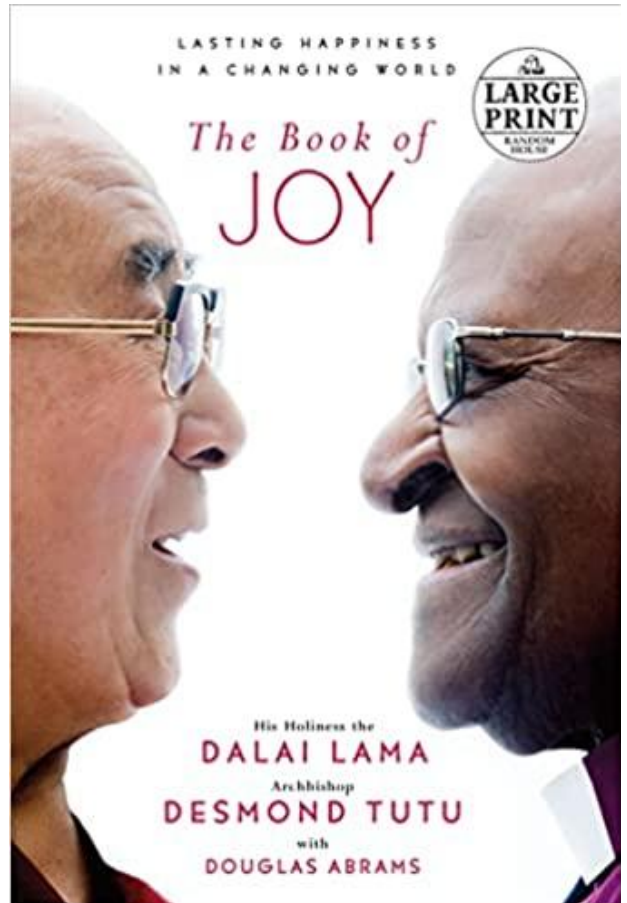
Christ in the House of Martha and Mary, by Johannes Vermeer (Detail).

16th Sunday in ordinary time: Today's readings: Genesis 18:1-10; Psalms 15:2-5, Colossians 1:24-28; Luke 10: 38-42.

In *The Book of Joy. Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* (2016), Douglas Abrams immortalised the encounter between two old friends: His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the late archbishop Desmond Tutu. This encounter, celebrating their birthdays in 2015, was meant also as a gift for others.

The week-long meeting, which took place in Dharamsala, India, at the Dalai Lama's residence in exile, was highly meaningful for the two inspiring figures. Ultimately it proved to be also meaningful for many others, as with the help of Abrams they shared with the whole world the fruits of their encounter and the beauty of their intimate friendship.

What made this encounter more significant is that these two friends are also contemporary inspiring figures hailing from two different faith traditions and worldviews. Therefore, their long-lasting, deep and affectionate friendship takes on another dimension and bears a deeper significance. The scenes of an exiled monk, hosting and welcoming a friend hailing from an 'alien' worldview are indeed captivating and beautifully humane. During the meeting, among other things, the archbishop manifested his gratitude for the Dalai Lama's hospitality. Reference was made also to India's 56-year-long hospitality to the exiled religious leader.



The Book of Joy. Lasting Happiness in a Changing World (2016), by Douglas Abrams

The meeting was, in fact, a celebration of hospitality, as the two leaders chose to ‘host’ the world in their personal friendship encounter, mainly by sharing their wisdom on what makes life humane and worth living.

From time immemorial, hospitality has indeed been valued as a virtue rooted in generosity that “expresses a fundamental aspect of our interdependence and our need for one another”. Both the Dalai Lama and archbishop Tutu, while pointing out that these values are important in all the world’s religions, recognise that this is so because, in truth, no

person can survive on their own. Observing that “so much of life is spent in sadness, stress and suffering” these great values hold the key to creative joy.

Deriving from the Latin *hospes*, hospitality, denotes welcoming the stranger, the enemy, someone who is perceived as hostile. Hence it pulls down the barriers between strangers and enemies, transforming them into friends for their own good and for the benefit of society and the world at large. Effectively it is a balancing act of justice amid abusive, unjust worldly structures.

“ Hospitality pulls down the barriers between strangers and enemies, transforming them into friends for their own good and for the benefit of society ”

In Judeo-Christian religious tradition, hosting a stranger was considered tantamount to hosting God. The story of Abraham hosting the three strangers in his tent drives the point home by specifying it was the Lord who “appeared to Abraham by the terebinth of Mamre as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot”. It was hospitality that brought to Abraham the gift of a new life according to the Lord’s promise: “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son.”

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God’s promise filled Abraham with the hope of a future, thanks to a generous act of hospitality. Commenting on generosity as one of the eight pillars of joy, archbishop Tutu notes that when we are closed on ourselves we head towards a dead end. From a Christian

perspective, generous hospitality is only possible because, as the Apostle says in today's second reading, it was primarily God who "chose to make known the riches of the glory of the mystery" of Christ, opening up divine life for us to share. Similarly, the Gospel presents us with the beautiful scene of Martha and Mary hosting Christ among them in friendship. Hosting Christ is the "better part" that will not be taken from the one who blamelessly walks in the path of generous and hospitable justice.

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