

## The spirituality of hospitality

Joan Chittister | Jun. 19, 2011

Benedictine spirituality  
is a sacramental spirituality.  
It holds all things--  
the earth and all its goods--  
as sacred.

When Benedict of Nursia began  
his new way of living  
in wild, licentious, sixth-century Rome,  
he turned that world upside down.

He took into his monastic community  
the rich and the poor,  
the slave and the free,  
the young and the old,  
artists and craftsmen,  
peasants and noblemen.  
It was a motley crew.

And then, as if that weren't enough,  
he opened the doors  
of the monastery  
to anyone who came,  
at any time,  
to anyone who knocked,  
no matter who they were  
or where they had been in life  
along the way.

"Great care and concern  
are to be shown,"  
the Rule goes on,  
"in receiving poor people  
and pilgrims because in them  
more particularly  
Jesus is received."

The point is clear:  
the guest, to the Benedictine, is much more

than simply another social contact.

Guests, the unknown and the wandering other,  
are the final  
and authentic addition  
to any Benedictine community.

Without them,  
the very notion of Benedictine community  
is suspect,  
is nothing but more of the same.  
Without the guest  
we make the community life  
all about us alone.

Families that concentrate  
only on themselves  
do not build up  
the entire human family.

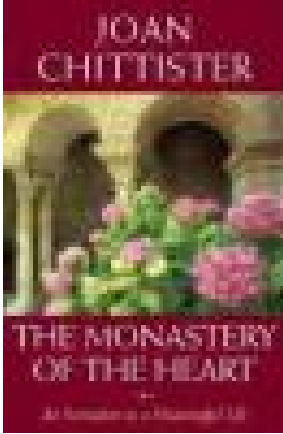
The Benedictine,  
on the other hand,  
is actually on the lookout for guests--  
for their needs,  
for their wisdom.

The guest in Benedictine spirituality  
is a visit from the God of Surprises  
who comes upon us  
at our most vulnerable  
and breaks us open  
to a new part of ourselves  
as well as to the needs of the other.

Guests bring the world in,  
place it at our feet,  
and dare us to be  
who and what we say we are.  
They are a blatant sign  
for all to see  
that any group that calls itself  
a Monastery of the Heart--  
but exists  
only for itself and its own kind--  
is really not a real community  
at all.

A Monastery of the Heart  
is a community with stretchable,  
permeable,

illimitable boundaries  
made up of anyone who happens  
to come into it  
at any time,  
and always saying,  
"We are here for you."



[This reflection comes from Sr. Joan Chittister 's book *The Monastery of the Heart: An*

*Invitation to a Meaningful Life* (BlueBridge).]

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