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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.

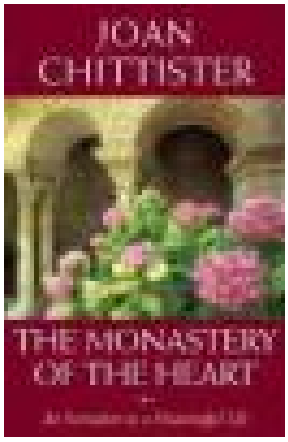
The Benedictine,
on the other hand,
is actually on the lookout for guests--
for their needs,
for their wisdom.

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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