

A reading from a sermon of St Gregory the Great

Two disciples were walking together on the road. They did not believe, yet they were talking about Jesus. Suddenly, he appeared, but without showing himself to them in a form that they could recognize. So the Lord realized on the outside, in the eyes of the body, what was in them within, in the eyes of the heart. Within themselves, the disciples loved and doubted all at once; on the outside, the Lord was present to them without however manifesting who He was. To those who spoke of him, he offered his presence; but to those who doubted him, he hid his familiar aspect, which would have enabled them to recognize him. He exchanged a few words with them, reproached them with their slowness in understanding, explained to them the mysteries of Holy Scripture concerning him, and yet, their hearts remaining foreign to him for lack of faith, he pretended to go further.

It was necessary to test them to see if, not yet loving him as God, they were at least capable of loving him as a traveler. Truth journeying with them, they could not remain strangers to love: they offered him hospitality, as one does for a traveler. Why, moreover, do we say that they proposed to him, as it is written in our gospel, "They pressed him." This example shows us that we should not only offer hospitality to travelers, but to accept it.

The disciples set the table, offer food; and God, whom they did not recognize in the explanation of Holy Scripture, they recognize it in the breaking of bread.

It is not by hearing the commandments of God that they have been enlightened, but by putting them into practice. Is it not written, "It is not those who hear the law who are righteous before God, but those who practice it will be justified" (Rom 2: 13). Thus, whoever wants to understand what he has heard must hasten to accomplish with his works what he has already managed to understand. As you can see, the Lord was not recognized when he spoke, but he deigned to be recognized when he was given food. Love, dear brothers, hospitality, love works inspired by charity. Paul says, "Let fraternal charity dwell in you, and beware of forgetting hospitality. For it is through her that some have made themselves acceptable to God by hosting angels." (Heb 13, 1-2). Peter says, "Be hospitable to one another without complaining." (1 Pet 4: 9). And

the Truth itself declares, "I was a stranger, and you received me." (Mt 25:35)

Here is a well-known story, which the story of our elders has passed on to us. A father and all his household practiced hospitality with great zeal, receiving daily travelers at their table. Now it happened that one day a traveler coming among others was brought to the table. And as the father of the family wanted, according to a custom full of humility, to pour water on the hands of his host, having turned around, he took the jug, but found no more, the next moment, the one on whose hands he wanted to pour the water. While he was admiring the thing to himself, the same night, the Lord told him in a vision: "The other days, you received me in my members, but yesterday, it was me in person that you received . "

Behold, the Lord coming for judgment will say, "What you did to one of the least of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). Now, before this judgment, when it is received in its members, it visits by itself those who receive it. And we are so lukewarm to practice hospitality! Consider, my brethren, what great virtue is hospitality. Receive Christ at your tables, to deserve to be received by him at the eternal banquet. Give shelter today to Christ who presents himself to you as a stranger, so that in the day of judgment you are not for him as strangers whom he does not know (cf Lk 13:25), but that he receives you as his own in his Kingdom. May he help us to achieve this, who, being God, lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.