

FR ALAN'S REFLECTION

HOSPITALITY

One day a poor boy was selling goods from door to door to pay his way through school found that he had only 10 cents left, and he was hungry. He decided he would ask for a meal in the next house. He lost his nerve when a lovely young woman from the next house opened the door and instead of asking for a meal he asked for a glass of water. She thought he looked hungry so brought him a large glass of milk. He drank it and then asked, 'How much do I owe you?' 'You don't owe me anything', she replied. 'My mother taught us never to accept payment for kindness'. He then said, 'I thank you from the bottom of my heart.'

Years later that young woman became critically ill. The local doctors were baffled. They sent her to a hospital in the city where specialists had the chance to study her rare disease. One of the doctors was called in for a consultation. When he heard the name of the town a light filled his eyes. He went down the halls of the hospital and went into her room. Upon entering the room, he recognized the woman at once. He went back to his consulting room determined to save her life. From that day he gave special attention to the case. After a long struggle he managed to cure this woman of her illness. Her life was saved. The doctor then asked the business office to pass the bill to him for final approval. He wrote something on the bill and the bill was then sent to her room. The woman was fearful of opening the bill as she was sure it would take her the rest of her life to pay for it. Finally, she looked, and something caught her eye on the side of the bill. She began to read the following words "Paid in full for one glass of milk."

Today's First Reading recounts an event in the life of the prophet Elisha. A woman of rank takes care of him without any self-interest. Her generosity was rewarded when she who was childless conceived and gave birth to a son just as the prophet Elisha had promised. In the first part of the story it is the woman who gives. She provides the prophet with a meal and a place where he can stay. She gave just like the young woman in the story gave that poor boy a large glass of milk when he came near her house. In the second part of the story it is the prophet Elisha who is the one who gives. He announces to the woman that in a years' time she will conceive and bear a son.

In the Gospel Jesus tells his disciples that even the smallest gesture of kindness done to someone will have its rewards. It is our daily experience that when we give without expecting a reward, we find that we are rewarded. Often, we find that we receive far more than what we give. Anyone who has volunteered their time and their services to help someone or to help a cause has experienced the satisfaction of giving.

As we journey through life, we can become afraid of strangers. Our first reaction can be is to put up barriers and keep them out of our lives. However, Christ calls us to welcome the strangers in our midst. Hospitality at its deepest level is keeping our hearts open to others. If we do that without any self-interest, then we will experience that the rewards are enormous. Jesus has taught that even a trivial act of kindness like giving a cup of cold water would not go unrewarded. Indeed, for the followers of Christ hospitality is very much at the core of our hearts and the very heart of the Gospel. Hence when we welcome a stranger, we welcome Christ.