

The Motive Of Hospitality

In a certain town there lived a cobbler, Martin Avděich by name. He had a tiny room in a basement, one window of which looked out on the street. Through it he could see only the feet of those who passed by, but Martin recognized many people by their boots, which he had repaired. He had plenty to do for he worked well, used good materials, and did not charge much.

Years before, his wife and children had died and Martin's despair had been so great that he reproached God. Then one day an old man stopped by from Martin's native village who had become a pilgrim and holy man. Martin opened his heart to him.

"I no longer wish to live," he said. "I am without hope."

The old man replied: "Your despair comes because you wish to live for your own happiness. Read the Gospels – there you will see how God would have you to live."

Martin bought himself a Bible. At first he meant to read it only on holy days but, once begun, it made his heart so light that he read it every day.

And so it happened that late one night, in the Gospel of Luke, Martin came to the part where a rich Pharisee invited the Lord to his house. A woman who was a sinner came and anointed the Lord's feet and washed them with her tears. The Lord said to the Pharisee: "Do you see this woman? I entered into your house, you gave Me no water for my feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head . . . My head with oil you did not anoint, but this woman has anointed My feet with ointment".

Martin pondered, 'He must have been like me, that Pharisee. If the Lord came to me, should I behave like that?' Then he laid his head upon his arms and fell asleep.

Suddenly Martin heard a voice and started from his sleep. No one was there. But he heard quite distinctly, 'Martin! Look out into the street tomorrow, for I shall come.'

The next morning Martin rose before daylight, lit the fire, and prepared his cabbage soup and porridge. Then he put on his apron and sat by the window to work. As he thought about the night before, he looked out into the street more than he worked. Whenever anyone passed in unfamiliar boots he would look up to see the face. A house porter passed, then a water-carrier. Presently an old man called Stepánich, who worked for a neighboring tradesman, began clearing the snow before Martin's window. Martin glanced at him, then went on with his work.

After he had made a dozen stitches he looked out again. Stepánich had leaned his shovel against the wall and was either resting or trying to get warm. Martin went to the door and beckoned. 'Come in,' he said, 'and warm yourself. You must be cold.'

'May God bless you!', Stepánich answered. He came in, shaking off the snow, and began wiping his feet. As he did so he tottered and nearly fell.

'Don't trouble,' Martin said. 'Sit down and have some tea.'

Filling two tumblers, Martin passed one to his visitor. Stepánich emptied his glass. It was plain that he would be glad of some more. Martin refilled the tumbler. As they drank Martin kept looking out into the street.

'Are you expecting anyone?' asked the visitor.

"Last night," Martin replied, "I was reading about how Christ went to a Pharisee who did not receive him with proper honor. Suppose such a thing could happen to me? What would I not do to receive him! Then as I dozed, I heard someone whisper, 'Look into the street tomorrow, for I shall come.'"

As Stepánich listened, tears ran down his cheeks. "Thank you, Martin Avděich. You have given me comfort for soul and body."

Stepánich went away, and Martin sat down to stitch a boot. As he looked out the window, a woman in peasant shoes passed and stopped by the wall. Martin saw that she was poorly dressed, a baby in her arms. With her back to

the wind she was trying to wrap the baby to her, though she wore only shabby summer clothes. Martin went out and invited them in.

Martin brought out some bread and soup. "Eat, my dear, and warm yourself," he said.

As the woman ate, she told him who she was. "I'm a soldier's wife. They sent my husband far away eight months ago, and I have heard nothing since. I have been unable to find work, and I've had to sell all I had for food. I pawned my last shawl yesterday."

Martin went to get an old cloak. "Here," he said. "It's worn out, but it will do to wrap the baby in."

The woman, taking it, burst into tears. "The Lord bless you."

Martin smiled and told her of the dream and the promised visit.

"Who knows? All things are possible," said the woman. She got up and wrapped the cloak around herself and the baby.

"Take this," said Martin, giving her money to get her shawl out of pawn. Then he saw her out.

Martin sat down to work again. Every time a shadow fell on the window, he looked up to see who was passing. After a while he saw a woman selling apples from a basket. On her back was a heavy sack she wanted to shift. As she placed her basket on a post, a boy in a tattered cap ran up, snatched an apple and tried to slip away. But the old woman seized the boy by his hair. The boy screamed, and the woman scolded.

Martin ran out into the street. The woman was threatening to take the boy to the police. "Let him go, Granny," Martin said. "Forgive him, for Christ's sake." The old woman let go. "Ask Granny's forgiveness," Martin told the boy.

The boy began to cry and to beg pardon. Martin took an apple from the basket and gave it to the boy, saying, "I will pay you, Granny."

"The rascal ought to be whipped," said the old woman.

"Oh, Granny," said Martin, "if he should be whipped for stealing an apple, what should be done to us for our sins? God bids us to forgive or we shall not be forgiven. We should forgive a thoughtless youngster most of all."

"It's true enough," said the old woman, "but they are getting terribly spoiled."

As she was about to hoist the sack on her back, the lad sprang forward. "Let me carry it for you, Granny. I'm going your way."

She put the sack on the boy's back, and they went down the street together.

Martin went back to work. Soon he could not see to pass the needle through the holes in the leather. He gathered his tools, swept up the cuttings and placed a lamp on the table. Then he took his Bible from the shelf.

He meant to open the book at a place he had marked, but it opened at another place. Then, hearing footsteps, he turned around. A voice whispered in his ear: "Martin, don't you know me?"

"Who is it?", muttered Martin.

"It is I," said the voice. And out of a dark corner of the room came Stepánich, who smiled and, vanishing like a cloud, was seen no more.

"It is I," said the voice again. And out stepped the woman with the baby in her arms. She smiled and the baby laughed, and they too vanished.

"It is I," said the voice once more. The old woman and the boy with the apple stepped out, smiled, and then vanished.

Martin's soul grew glad. He began reading the Gospel where it had opened. At the top of the page he read:

“For I was hungry, and you gave me meat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in.”

At the bottom of the page he read:

“Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.”

And so Martin understood that the Savior really had come to him on that day, and he had welcomed him.

“For some have entertained Angels unawares” [Hebrews 13:2]

– Article submitted by Chuck Wetzel, 05.11.20