

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

Once I attended a banquet in Beijing, China. I was on a trade mission for the state of Delaware. The dinner included many courses and many toasts.

There was “unexpected hospitality,” but not “overflowing hospitality.”

Once I attended a business dinner in Saudi Arabia. The meal consisted of a whole goat served on a huge brass tray. In their tradition, we sat on the floor and used our hands to eat.

There was “unexpected hospitality,” but not “overflowing hospitality.”

Once I attended a convention in Sweden. Part of the meeting included being entertained in the home of a local family. We had a special holiday meal of crayfish.

There was “unexpected hospitality,” but not “overflowing hospitality.”

So, just what is “overflowing hospitality,” anyway? Well, I wasn’t familiar with the term myself. I’d experienced such, but I didn’t know its name until just recently. Let me set the stage and may it help bring to mind such an incredibly grace-filled moment in your own life.

It was an early southern summer’s night. My husband and I were invited to dinner at a couple’s home. They live in the quaint historic town of Moorseville, Alabama. Its circa is 1818. Not much

has changed since its conception. That's why it was used as the location for the movie Tom Sawyer. I was really looking forward to this occasion for days. It was not only because of this intriguingly unique venue, but also because of our host and hostess' declaration. They said they wanted to celebrate our recent marriage. Even though it's been eight months, we still love celebrating this glorious gift and love when others want to join in our great gladness.

These dear people set the pace from the moment we entered their house. We all gathered in the kitchen. Is there ever any place better? A kitchen seems so often to be the heart of a home.

I'd never been with either one of them individually, for they were my husband's friends. Instantly, I was put at ease for there was such a warmth and comfortableness.

We sat around their kitchen table as our hostess stirred a few dishes on the stove. While sitting there, I asked about a little metal wine cup and tray which were there. She said we'd learn about that later.

We were offered a drink and then were asked if we'd like to stroll around town. We enthusiastically said yes.

This we did. It only takes about 20 minutes. We'd stop and hear the history of various homes and public buildings. There is a church and a post office and a meetinghouse. We spoke to a few neighbors who were outside.

It was just such a sweet, slow, slip back into earlier times.

In my memory, it reminded me of my visits as a child to my grandmother's home in Uniontown, Alabama.

Roller skates and skipping could have easily become the next appropriate activity, but instead, we went back to their home and back to that wonderful kitchen.

Dinner was now ready. And we were told that we were going to eat outside. With "outside," I just assumed that meant on their back porch - but oh no. As I was helping carry out a few of the dishes, I was told we weren't eating on the porch, but truly - "outside."

We walked out the screen door down some steps and followed a path around to the side of the house. The backyard was large with beautiful planting, for our hostess is a wonderful gardener. Ah, but the side yard - the side yard was even more magnificent. Huge old trees, flowers and plants and grass all growing in such harmony, you felt like you had entered a cathedral. And, in fact, I believe we had, for it surely was holy ground.

And there, situated perfectly among all this beauty was our dinner. It was such a surprise. It was set a table just perfectly for the four of us. It almost took my breath away. It touched my heart so how they had so lovingly prepared this night to honor us.

But guess what, Pilgrim, I'm not even at the best part. The best part was the blessing.

Our host is Jewish and he explained in his tradition often a particular prayer is offered before an important occasion and that they would like to offer it for us in celebration of our marriage. They also brought out that small metal wine cup and tray which looked very much like a miniature chalice and paten that we use at our church when we celebrate our Lord's Supper.

We were told in the Jewish tradition it is called a "Kiddush Cup." And many times a boy or girl receives a Kiddush Cup at his or her bar or bat mitzpha and it is cherished for life. It is used at the individual family's Holy Day services.

We all bowed our heads and this prayer was prayed: "Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, for giving us life, and enabling us to reach this season."

Then our host filled the Kiddush Cup until it was overflowing with wine and as the wine spilled over its sides, he continued with his prayer. He prayed for overflowing blessings for us as a couple.

It truly touched my heart and was a holy moment, a humbling moment. That, my Precious Pilgrim, was without a doubt, an example of "overflowing hospitality."

And then, just last week, I drove an hour and a half to Birmingham to attend a ladies' luncheon. In fact, I'd done the very same drive the previous week to attend the very same luncheon. (I'd gotten the days mixed up, but never mind. I'd drive that same route again and again if need be in order to honor Merle.)

For you see, Merle, for the last three years had once a week been giving "overflowing hospitality" to these same group of ladies at her home. Even though she herself was a newcomer to the city, she offered her home for this group. The M&Ms, as they have recently named themselves (which stands for "Martha's" and "Mary's"), gathered weekly for a Bible study at Merle's.

I was only privileged to attend the one year I lived there. Oh, but did it ever make a difference in my life. It was just a month or

two after my late husband's death from a heart attack. I still was very fragile and we'd only moved back to Birmingham a few months earlier.

Although I'd been raised there, the support groups - church and reconnecting with high school friends was all new and hard. As I said, I was fragile.

I mentioned to a friend I needed a Bible study. And she knew of one and called one of her friends who was attending it. And that friend called me and I committed and thank the dear Lord I did.

Each week I'd walk into Merle's home. I'd receive Bible study and prayer along with friendship and fellowship and encouragement and chatter and hugs and laughter and sometimes a few tears. If I had to ball up all this love and present it in two words, I'd have to say what I received at Merle's each week for a whole year was "overflowing hospitality."

Ah, Precious Pilgrim, have you experienced such? As a Christian, I know you have! It began almost 2,000 years ago and flows just as strongly today as it did then.

Matthew 26:26-28 says:

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it and brake it and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take eat, this is my body." And He took the cup and gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it; for this is the blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

That, Pilgrim, is the Ultimate "Overflowing Hospitality." May we give thanks and be humbly grateful to our Lord each and every

time we receive. May we each not just be filled to the brim with His love, but may His love bubble up and overflow to others. May we each become vessels of His overflowing hospitality.

I am your sister in Christ,

Lucy