## **A Reflection on Time**

*“One day it occurred to a certain emperor that if he only knew the answers to three questions, he would never stray in any matter: What is the best time to do each thing? Who are the most important people to work with? What is the most important thing to do at all times?”*

These are the opening lines to Leo Tolstoy’s short story *The Emperor’s Three Questions*. After seeking advice and answers of many counselors in his court, the emperor embarks upon a journey to the mountains to visit a wise hermit. Tolstoy tells of the emperor’s near misses with harm, his interactions with other travels, his ministry to a wounded man and an experience of reconciliation all along the way. In the end the hermit shares a bit of wisdom that many spiritual and pastoral care professionals intuitively know.

*"Remember that there is only one important time and that is now. The present moment is the only time over which we have dominion. The most important person is always the person you are with, who is right before you, for who knows if you will have dealings with any other person in the future? The most important pursuit is making the person standing at your side happy, for that alone is the pursuit of life."*

Hospitality as the cultivation of time is the theme for this year’s spiritual care week and resonates deeply with the values of the Catholic health ministry. We are called to emulate the hospitality of God who is fully present to us in all times and all places; paradoxically living in a specific time and place in the person of Jesus as well as existing outside of time.

When we are hospitable to others we accept them in their concrete realities and attend to their physical, emotional and spiritual needs in such a way that transcends the everyday. When we have been truly welcomed, whether it be in a momentary interaction or an hour-long visit we find ourselves outside of the grind of the clock and in the timelessness of grace.

## **Prayer**

**God of all graciousness,**

**You bestow the gift of time upon each of us in our own measure.**

**Guide us to use the time given to us in your service.**

**Open our eyes to the graces, hidden and explicit, in each moment.**

**May we always see you in the person standing before us and offer our wonder and welcome to the mystery of you in them.**

**We pray all this, trusting in your time and your seasons of love.
Amen.**