

Fourteenth Sunday of the Year:

The holiday season gets off to its “official” start next weekend. The schools break up and, even if the hot summer days are spent at home, the pattern of life for all is changed for a couple of weeks. Many people do go away, some to seaside resorts or to different parts of the country, others go abroad. Some people like to return to resorts they know or to places of which they can never get enough, while others like to explore countries or regions they have never visited before. I never tire of the Swiss Alps and in particular of the Bernese Oberland, and yet I feel that it might be a good idea for me to take my vacation in a place I have never been to as yet. I know that Pope Francis remains in Rome throughout the summer and it has been six years now since a pope has been in Castelgandolfo for the summer months. Most of us, however, do take a summer holiday. Couples do so as much for their children as for themselves.

There are many church communities in seaside resorts both here and overseas who have developed a systematic pastoral apostolate directed at tourists and visitors. There is a recognition that most people today do take a summer holiday. Churches have multi-lingual ministers of welcome at the church door every Sunday, others have the scripture readings of the Sunday available in a variety of languages so that visitors can participate in the liturgy, while some churches have parishioners loitering at the church door at the end of Mass to invite visitors to tea or coffee in the church hall. So, just as many people like to worship and keep up their religious practice when away, so churches in big cities or in holiday resorts make a specific effort to welcome and include tourists.

Much ministry to tourists is based on a recognition of the fact that one will only see these people once. Just as restaurants on the Costa del Sol, the Riviera or Rome know that most of their patrons will only ever dine in their premises once, so too churches who welcome tourists. Now, while there are restaurants which deliberately do their best knowing that their patrons will only be there *once*, there are others who, knowing they will never see these particular patrons again, just attempt to fleece them and treat them in an off-hand manner. Most churches, even those not in holiday resorts, have strangers attending Mass during the summer months, and some of these too are once-off visitors. The more attentive the resident parish community is to the visitor among them, the more welcoming the priest is to new faces which present themselves, and the more inclusive is the liturgical celebration, the more positive the experience of the visitor will be. *I was a stranger and you made me welcome.*

Those who visit churches during their holidays might take note of how parishes abroad or in other parts of the country made them welcome – and they might share their experiences when they get back. Meanwhile those of us back at the ranch might make a concerted effort to notice our visitors, introduce ourselves to them and help them if necessary. It would be good to make them feel we value having them with us. We do not take temporary leave of our religious practice on holiday, we just live the reality of our faith a little differently – and it can bear abundant fruit.

Father Patrick