

## Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners,

Within the past ten days it was my pleasure to attend the Silver Jubilee celebrations of two diocesan priests. It was a singular pleasure for me to preach the homily at the second of these festive Masses: I had been the MC at the ordination and had also preached at the tenth anniversary in 2003. In the quarter century which has elapsed since the ordination of these two priests in 1993 a great deal has happened in our world. Of course, any twenty-five year period chosen at random out of the rich, colourful and troubled history of Europe will be crowded with significant events that have, in their way, changed the world. In my homily I reflected on the period between 1791 and 1816, in what the French would call a *cas d'école*, a sample case study. We had the French Revolution, the execution of a monarch and his spouse (Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette), the Terror, the crowning of Napoleon, his European empire and finally, in the wheat fields 15 km south of Brussels, the Battle of Waterloo. In that period Beethoven wrote his string quartets, piano concerti and most of his symphonies. And lots else happened.

The quarter century since 1993 – the year in which my two friends were ordained – has witnessed equally dramatic and potentially more lasting change, change which has affected everyone on the planet, unlike the retreat from Moscow or the Battle of Waterloo. Our lives have been altered out of all recognition by the smart phone, the internet, GPS and the unprecedented migratory flows across not only Europe but other parts of the world. But it is above all the way in which the Church as we knew it has been challenged and changed that has impacted on the life of priests and promises to shape their uncertain future that I thought important to highlight in my homily. Trouble caused by the child-abuse scandals and the way they were managed, the sharp decline in numbers training for the priesthood in what few seminaries remain in Europe, and the rising unhappiness in the ranks of the laity with certain Church teachings – less matters of dogma such as split the Church in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, but matters of discipline which, according to the most voluble critics, take little or no account of the way real people live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A priest is a man who dwells with his people, he is among them, he ministers to them, their needs shape the pattern of his life. What matters to them matters to him. He is with them in the name of Jesus Christ and empowered to minister by the graces bestowed and the mandate given by the Church. It was my distinct impression that the two priests, who had an impressive track record of dedicated and unselfish ministry to the people confided to their charge, were fully conscious of the way the changed, modern world shaped them and determined what they longed for in regard to themselves and their children. The priest of today is ministering to the people of 2018 and the Church can only fulfil Christ's mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God and its values if they take their cue from the world of 2018.

**Father Patrick**