

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners,

On Friday evening I celebrated, almost to the hour, the first anniversary of my arrival at Our Lady & St. Anne as parish priest. I celebrated my first Mass in the parish church at 18.00 hrs. on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross 2017. On that same feast this year I celebrated Mass at the slightly later hour of 19.30 as I had just returned from the first leg of my holiday. Twelve months have gone by and what happy and grace-filled months they were. I was going to say “slipped” by, but that would be inaccurate and would not do those months justice. I have been acutely aware at every stage that I was doing most things at Caversham for the *first* time. It was my first Advent, my first Christmas, my first Lent and Holy Week and my first Rock and Ale Festival. I observed myself as I worked my way into my new role and I have deliberately taken things at a gentle pace. In 1999 I went into what was then my first parish boots ‘n all, and needless to say the parishioners wisely put the brakes on my impatient enthusiasm. I am, of course, older and one would hope wiser too. But it has been good to stand aside from the liturgical traditions, the parish customs and the OL & St. Anne way of doing things to take it all in and to consider how we move forward.

I have expended much energy in life learning foreign languages and have found that the most effective way of doing this is to work in two registers: to learn vocabulary, to master grammar and to read the literature in the language; but also to stand back, to see the mind-set which expresses itself in a particular way, and to study the cultural assumptions and values behind the language as it is written and expressed. So, for example, I not only strive to master German grammar and vocabulary, but also to understand why the Germans speak the way they do – tone of voice, choice of words, body language – so as to get some insight into the culture underneath. I have done the same with our parish: observed, gone with the flow and listened to the concerns of parishioners (not least about the timing of the Christmas “Midnight” Mass)! So for me the past twelve intense months have taught me a lot about the learning process and about what a parish community with a profile such as ours needs to live out their Catholic faith in the rapidly changing world of 2018 and beyond.

Father Patrick