

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners,

The Church is something that matters a great deal to us. We are members of the Church and have been so since our Baptism. We had an idea of the Church when we were in the junior school; our First Holy Communion and Confirmation were big moments on our journey towards maturity. Some of us were involved in parish life, the older of us were members of Church organisations or were altar servers. A few of us went to Catholic secondary schools and when we went up to university some of us frequented the Catholic university chaplaincy. The wider Church too fascinated us. We revered the figure of the Pope, we had some idea of the geographic borders of our diocese and, when we travelled abroad and visited great cathedrals or monasteries – be it Ulm, Vienna, Toledo or Venice – we entered these buildings and felt a sense of belonging. In all of them we knelt and prayed, knowing that the Blessed Sacrament was the same as in the tabernacle back home. We all had a sense of the Catholic Church and a few of us were interested in its inner workings: who the bishops were; we were familiar with some of the religious orders and could distinguish them by their habits; and we had a vague idea of what made us different from Orthodox, Anglicans or Protestants. Most of us took the Church and its structures for granted most of the time: just like the apparatus of State, it was part of the wallpaper of our lives. We wished the Church well in the knowledge that if the whole operation prospered, our parish would also do well.

In recent years, however, the Church is too frequently in the news for comfort, especially as so much of what we learn about it and hear others say about it is disquieting. There are scandals in society and it was ever thus, but scandals in the Church affect us differently. We become uncomfortable, we suppress shock, we turn a deaf ear to yet more news of scandal and cover-up and carry on with our religious observances in our own parish, where we feel safe. But soon the bad news laps up on our shores as well and then our loyalties and our beliefs are severely tested. It has to be admitted we have reached that stage here now. Our relationship with the institutional Church is changed, we are bewildered and do not quite know where to turn. Perhaps perplexity and distress, sadness and rage, are things we must live with for the foreseeable future.

A ship can negotiate a storm but the captain and crew have to adopt different tactics, they have to work out a strategy which is adequate to the challenges high seas and rough weather pose. Sailing tranquilly across a calm sea is a very different story. In these circumstances I do gain comfort from the story of Jesus walking on the waters to rescue his disciples in the boat who were terrified of drowning. I do believe that Jesus is with us and am convinced that we as a community, as a living cell of his mystical body, can find him if we pray, open our ears to his voice and our hearts to both his love and to one another.

Father Patrick