

## Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners,

One of the tasks faced by the parish priest in October is the planning of sacramental preparation programmes. There is some urgency this year with the Sacrament of Confirmation because the ceremony itself is scheduled for 27 March. The First Holy Communion Masses will be celebrated, as usual, in June. In the coming days I will be meeting with the teachers in St. Anne's School who are teaching in the respective sacramental years. It is my plan to meet our parish catechists too in the near future to plan the after-school courses for the children in our parish who do not attend the parish school. I was very pleased on visiting St. Anne's School this week to go and see the year group which made its First Communion last June and recognise so many of the children, although not all, from having seen them so regularly across the summer at Children's Liturgy.

The issue which continually arises with sacramental preparation is the commitment of both parents and children not so much to regular participation in the sacramental programme as to their on-going commitment to Mass attendance after the First Holy Communion day or the Confirmation liturgy is over. And I have been trying to figure out a positive solution to this perpetual challenge. Rather than adopt, as priests have done in the past, a big-stick approach, I would like to suggest that parents reflect on what they are missing by not attending the Sunday Eucharist with the regularity and fidelity the Church expects. If we manage to present Sunday Mass attendance in terms of added value, as something it is such a shame to miss, then we are giving an up-beat message.

There are those who might regret that we are reduced to such tactics, but it is a question of faith practice for the people of 2018 who live in and negotiate the shifting values of a very confusing and fast-moving age. It is vital, nonetheless, that parents who present their children to the Church for the sacraments should also realise that in so doing they are also committing themselves to regular practice of the faith. And by practice, we understand attendance at the Sunday liturgy and belonging to the family of faith which is the parish community. There is a link, therefore, between putting children forward for the sacraments and a commitment to on-going practice of the faith once these two bench-mark sacraments have been received. Regular religious practice is the logical consequence of receiving Holy Communion and Confirmation, and the sacraments only come alive through membership of the Eucharistic community and through Holy Communion becoming the day-to-day spiritual nourishment of God's faithful people.

**Father Patrick**