

## Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners,

We are currently celebrating the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Last year, my first as parish priest at Our Lady & St. Anne, it was I who had the privilege of preaching at the Unity Service at St. Peter's, the Anglican parish church of Caversham. It was gratifying on that occasion to find that, despite the short time I had been here, I recognised and knew about two thirds of the congregation. I knew all the clergy of the home team as well as those present from the non-conformist denominations, but the laity present too were not unknown to me, given that 50% of them came from Our Lady & St. Anne! It is we who are hosting the Unity Service next Wednesday and I have every confidence that the home team will see to it that our pews are well filled and that our guests from the other Christian churches of Caversham will be made welcome and feel at home. We have opted for an Order of Service loosely inspired by the Churches Together in Britain & Ireland template for 2019 and care has been taken to see to it that the hymns are ones which we Catholics know.

It is interesting to reflect on what it is exactly we are praying *for* at a unity service. We come together acknowledging our confessional divisions, recognising that while we are all Christians and disciples of Jesus Christ, our understanding of what that implies and our ways of celebrating this identity, which is so dear to all of us, is quite different. The Baptists or Methodists who come to OL & St. Anne will immediately recognise that our church building and its furnishings are quite different to what surrounds them when they gather on the Lord's Day. My neighbour, the vicar of St. Andrew's where I had the honour of preaching on 30 November, the patronal feast, will feel more at home, even if his understanding of the truths we share and the scriptures we all read is shaped by Reformation heritage rather than the pronouncements of the papal magisterium! But the emphasis is on *unity*, unity as an acquisition and unity as an aspiration. I like to focus on what unites us already: a belief in God, an acceptance of the Bible as divine revelation, resort to the patronage of Mary and the saints (think of all the dedications of Anglican parish churches across the land), and the Creed. This Lent here at OL & St. Anne we will be studying the Nicene Creed which both Catholics and Anglicans recite every Sunday at morning and evening worship (Anglican Evensong sometimes has the shorter version, the Apostles' Creed).

That is already a lot that we share in common, even if we understand some of the central truths the Creed contains differently. In our service of prayer together on Wednesday 23rd we will give thanks for the Creed and for what the truths it proclaims mean to us and the effect they have on our lives. We will also pray that the unity we already possess may be preserved, and ask the Lord to help us grow together in the future to a greater *common* understanding of what he meant when he prayed: *that they may all be one*.

**Father Patrick**