

## Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners,

Next week Pope Francis will meet with all the presidents of the Bishops' Conferences of the Catholic world. This is not a meeting about re-defining dogma nor about taking the Church's pulse sixty years after the dramatic changes and reforms introduced in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. Most bishops, the huge majority of priests and virtually all our lay people know no other Church than that which was re-shaped as a result of the decisions taken and the insights which emerged from Vatican II. One of the great achievements of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II was to copper-fasten the reforms and theological understanding of the Church and her mission emerging from the Council into the law, tradition and ways of thinking and doing of the Church. Of course, the Council is history and the Church of today finds itself in a world which even the most farsighted of bishops could never have predicted in the 1960's.

Pope Francis, in a move which is without precedent in the Church's history, has summoned the bishop with primary and overarching responsibility for the Church in his country/region to Rome to talk about one and one only subject. He wants to discover from them how it was possible that the sexual abuse of children should have been so deeply embedded in the life of the Church in their countries, how they and their predecessors had dealt with the issue, how they had dealt with criminous clerks (a term borrowed from the Middle Ages but *ad rem* as it was one of Thomas Becket's biggest headaches and the one which brought him into direct confrontation with the State authorities), how they had acquiesced in cover-ups and silence, and how they had neglected to take pastoral care of those who had been abused. No one doubts the commitment of Pope Francis to addressing the issue of sexual abuse (and its concomitant abuse of power) while there are some voices questioning the speed at which he is proceeding. Pope Francis, let us not forget, is a Jesuit and one of the gifts conferred by Ignatius of Loyola on the Society of Jesus and on all those who have benefited over the centuries from their spiritual guidance is the gift of *discernment*. And it strikes me that Pope Francis is currently discerning how best to proceed: fidelity to gospel values but also respect for the rule of law (canon and civil, the preference given to the latter), being his guiding principles. Pope Francis seeks to *understand* first, then to *take action*.

We must give him time and we must then all work together to see to it that the safeguarding of our children becomes the default reaction of all of us throughout the Church, the safeguarding discipline - national and diocesan - the template on which we all work. We pray for the Bishop of Rome and his interlocutors over the coming days, but we pray too that our children may grow up in a world more protective of their innocence, more committed to their welfare. It is worth also remembering that as well as being our children they are primarily children of God.

**Father Patrick**