

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners and dear Friends of Our Lady & St. Anne who visit our parish website,

For many the summer holidays begin this weekend. Our parish primary school is having its end of year Mass on Tuesday and I am expecting congregation numbers to be down episodically over the next six weeks or so. Many of us will be visiting other countries during the holiday period and most of us meeting up with old friends or family living elsewhere. All of us will be meeting new people and encountering people we have never had contact with before. Those staying in hotels, for example, will be meeting receptionists, room service staff, waiters/waitresses in restaurant or bar, to say nothing of the many people we may defer to at the breakfast buffet counter or make way for as they search for their table. Many of those we casually interact with will be speaking a foreign language: they like us make snap judgements about all of our fellow-nationals by the impression we make on them. So, even the most casual meeting or the most fleeting encounter we have in a foreign setting or environment, can make a disproportionately big difference or a lasting impression.

It is often the case that the reputation of a country is made by how its citizens behave when abroad, not least in a holiday setting where there is competition for attention in busy hotels, children wanting to use the swimming pool at the same time or adults out drinking in tapas bars until the small hours. I often think of how quickly a reputation can be made for good and ill when I go to Mass in a foreign country, or when I am aware that at Masses here a higher than usual number of people from abroad are joining us for worship. Because it is the beginning of the holiday period and because, as perusal of the Bulletin this weekend will make clear, *hospitality* is the theme of both the OT and Gospel readings at Sunday Mass, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on how we as a parish community can make sure that those visiting us for the first (and perhaps only) time can be made welcome and enjoy an experience of worship, liturgy and prayer that they may remember for all the right reasons. Welcoming them at the door, recognising that they are visitors as they leave, perhaps asking them where they are from, gives to them a strong signal that they are noticed and that we value their albeit fleeting presence among us.

English is the second language of most of humanity and the clarity, composure and engagement of those who proclaim God's word makes the message accessible and the congregation feel included. Our fidelity to the *rubrics* of the Roman liturgy means that people from other countries will recognise that it is the *same* Mass and that the priest and host community have the same religious priorities as they find in their home parishes. The visitor recognises immediately a host community where good relations prevail, where the dynamic between pastor and congregation is functioning well, and where God and kingdom values dictate the way parishioners behave towards one another and, most importantly, towards our visitors during the time that they join us. That is hospitality in practice, that is reaching out to the stranger, that is making our brothers and sisters in the Lord welcome among us.

Father Patrick