

## Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners and friends who visit our parish website,

On Monday our children return to school after the summer vacation. For all of them a new year brings fresh challenges and a new experience. Some are just starting in Reception, some are moving into Year 6, others are commencing at secondary school, and those coming to the end of their teenage years are in starting their final year of Sixth Form with university or the world of work beckoning. For teachers too a new school year is always an exciting fresh departure. Before God got in the way and revealed another plan to me for my life, I had always envisaged myself as being a teacher either in a secondary school or at a university. I will never be sure whether the alternative path would have been successful and, given that my life as a secular priest in parochial ministry has been so full, varied and fulfilling, I chase away fanciful thoughts about how a teaching career would have worked out.

Ever since ordination I have been closely involved with the parish primary school, once being chair of governors, twice being on the governing body, and then I have been seven years chaplain in a big Catholic comprehensive college which, with Mr. Gove's magic wand, was transformed into an Academy in my last year in my chaplaincy role. At St. Edmund's College I was able to observe the challenges of managing a large school and the way the teachers taught their subjects from the side-lines. There were some teachers who, in the way they inter-acted with the pupils and in the manner in which they infected them with enthusiasm for their subject, taught me a lot. It is that taking seriously those who are being taught and it is the giving, the sharing of knowledge with them as something we treasure ourselves that makes a good teacher.

Shortly after the Millennium the Birmingham Diocese, under the inspiration of the then Archbishop Vincent Nichols and driven by the then director of education, Father Markus Stock, produced a ground-breaking document on the underlying principles of Catholic education. The document was called *Christ at the Centre*. The title appealed greatly to me and I reflected on how it also defined the mission of a parish. And I thought that, even if I did not have a gown and mortar board and serried rows of pupils in the benches before me, I could still be a teacher. Jesus was hailed as a teacher and even addressed on occasion as 'Teacher.' Most agree he was an excellent one. The parables reveal how skilful a pedagogue he was. Moreover, he did not draw attention to himself: he came to proclaim the kingdom of God. Our job as his disciples is to unpack that notion for our people and infect them with our enthusiasm for it. I saw how professors who taught me did that for philosophy or theology, I witnessed teachers doing that for mathematics or history, and now I can do that to break open the gospel message and unlock the Church's treasure chest - so maybe my youthful dream about becoming a teacher has come true after all.

**Father Patrick**