

## 13A

*They tell us that one of the reasons behind the Brexit vote last year was that people believed there are too many foreigners coming into the country by fair means or foul putting undue pressure on public services and showing a lack of willingness to integrate with the general population. They could have a point but that shouldn't absolve us of our responsibility in our personal lives to welcome the stranger. It's a gospel priority.*

While on retreat recently a Priest told me that on one occasion while visiting his native parish, he decided to call on the local Parish Priest. But he was given such a frosty reception with none of the normal courtesies that he would be in no rush to visit him again. Glad to say that it doesn't happen very often among the clergy but it shouldn't really happen at all. '*Cead mile failte*' – '*a hundred thousand welcomes*' is the catchphrase of the Irish tourist board. Sad to say it's wearing a lot thinner these days than in times past when people had a lot more time for each other.

St Paul says in one of his epistles: 'Make hospitality your special care'. We're so focussed on work these days that being busy has become a status symbol. So much so that making time for each other can slip down our list of priorities. Our Lord never told anyone to go away and come back tomorrow because he was too busy. They tell us that one of the qualities which St Theresa of Calcutta was renowned for was the way she gave every person who sought her out, whether filthy rich or abjectly poor, her full undivided attention.

The passage from the Book of Kings, in the first reading, shows a caring, hospitable elderly woman going out of her way to welcome the Prophet Elisha and make him feel at home. She was amply rewarded and so will we. Even a cup of cold water given in love will not be forgotten by God.

We have a growing number of lay ministers involved in the Mass these days but the ministry of hospitality is rarely mentioned. Yet it is so important. But surely we all should be ministers of welcome. After all, by virtue of our baptism, we should see ourselves as brothers and sisters of each other in the one catholic family.

There is a story told about an elderly gentleman in a particular parish who regularly left his hat on at church which often aroused the congregation's curiosity. When asked why he left his hat on, he replied: 'It's the only way I can get parishioners in this church to talk to me. Well I know we're not like that.

It requires a 'certain death to self' to welcome others with a warm friendly disposition. A couple of weeks ago Petrina spoke to us about migrants and how our Christianity is put to the test by the quality, or lack of it, of our welcome. A friendly smile and kindly word 'to break the ice' can go a long way.

*At the Final Judgement, Jesus will say to those on his right hand: 'I was a stranger and you made me welcome, enter into my Kingdom'. That is the least we can do but it makes all the difference.*