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Some commentators were saying 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 being slow to integrate with the general population. Whatever way one looks at it, however, it 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 return there. 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. I'm sure the same could be said of this country.

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 special virtues of St Theresa of Calcutta was the way she gave every person she came into contact with her full and undivided attention. I'm told the same was true of Pope St John Paul II.

We have a growing number of lay ministers involved in the Mass these days but the ministry of hospitality is rarely at the top of the list. 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. A friendly smile and kindly word 'to break the ice' can go a long way.*

And then there's the whole area of asylum seekers, migrants and refugees coming our way. People seems divided on these issues but as Christians we need to weight up our Christian commitment to hospitality alongside a host of other issues, one of which is enabling them to have a dignified way of life and integrate better with the indigenous population.

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.