

Homily 15th Sunday Year B 2021

On a visit to India with a fellow Assumptionist we were taken across country to Pune after landing in Mumbai. We were visiting a Religious Community of Sisters. To welcome us they placed a red powdered circle on our foreheads and a garland of flowers around our necks. We were told that this was a traditional welcome to first time visitors. The belief was that any stranger who comes to visit could be a god.

Before Communism overran Russia, late on in life, people would go on a long pilgrimage across Russia visiting various sacred shrines along the way. Families would feel honoured and blessed to welcome these pilgrims into their homes where they were welcome to stay before moving on. In thanksgiving for the hospitality received, pilgrims would tell stories of spiritual encounters on their way.

We are made in the image of God, all of us. Every encounter is an encounter with God and an occasion of blessing. If the encounter is hostile and abusive, we do not have the right to respond in kind. This sacred sense of hospitality was very strong in the Middle East in Jesus' day and the apostles would have generally expected to receive a welcome as strangers to a village. There was a great sense of honour in the welcome given to a stranger.

The plague we have experienced has reminded us of the importance of friendship and welcome, and the sacred element of our encounters which have been so restricted. As we move out of lockdown, do not lose this sense of the sacred presence in every encounter.

From the Small Beatitudes by Joseph Folliet

Blessed are those who can laugh at themselves;
they will have no end of fun.

Blessed are those who are sane enough
not to take themselves too seriously;
they will be valued most by those about them.

Happy are you if you can take small things seriously
and face serious things calmly; you will go far in life.

Happy are you if you can appreciate a smile and forget a frown;
you will walk on the sunny side of the street.

Happy are you if you can be kind in
understanding the attitudes of others
even when the signs are unfavourable;
you may be taken for a fool, but this is the price of charity.

Blessed are those who think before acting and pray before thinking;
they will avoid many blunders.

Happy are you if you know how to hold your tongue and smile,
even when people interrupt and contradict you or tread on your toes;
the Gospel has begun to seep into your heart.

Above all, blessed are you who recognise the Lord in all whom you meet;
the light of truth shines in your life for you have found true wisdom.

The good wife apologized to her unexpected guests for serving the apple pie without cheese. The little boy of the family slipped quietly away from the table for a moment, and returned with a cube of cheese, which he laid on the guest's plate. The visitor smiled in recognition of the lad's thoughtfulness, popped the cheese into his mouth, and then remarked:

"You must have sharper eyes than your mother, sonny. Where did you find it?"

The boy replied with a flush of pride: **"In the rat-trap."**