**HOMILY PREACHED ON THE 13th SUNDAY OF YR A 2023**

## Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me

# Human nature being what it is, it is not unusual to hear two completely different reactions to a situation or an event, sometimes extreme opposites. Last year, when I was sent on supply to another Douia parish, I heard two different experiences of people who attend Mass in that church. One from someone who complained that since he had begun attending the church, only two people had spoken to him, and then to ask him for money, and that he felt unwelcomed. In contrast, I heard from a couple who happened to be staying in the area and went to Mass in church x – they told me how much they appreciated being welcomed so warmly and although they had never been inside the church before they felt very much at home.

Two of our readings today highlight the importance of hospitality. Nowadays hospitality is a very different matter from what it used to be when no-one locked their doors. Yet today there is more need than ever for hospitality and friendliness in a world where there is a lot of loneliness and a lot of people who feel alienated, marginalised, ignored.

Hospitality to our friends is no big deal. There is no risk involved and there is every likelihood that the favour will be returned. But hospitality to a stranger is a great thing. You don’t owe anything to a stranger and there is a risk involved.

Christ calls us to welcome strangers into our midst - and the ultimate motivation for this is clear – for to welcome the stranger is to welcome Christ himself.

For followers of Christ, hospitality is not an optional extra. It is at the very heart of the gospel. If we Christians get into ghettos where we isolate ourselves and do not reach out to others,then what hope is there for the world? The rewards of reaching out to others are enormous - the growth of understanding, friendliness and co-operation, things our neighbourhoods are crying out for.

That being the case. we might ask ourselves today not just how we as individuals might put today’s gospel in to practice, but also how we can be more hospitable as a parish community.

As you look round church, how many people do you know? Can you put names to all the faces around you? We are a large parish and it would be impossible to know everyone, but we can try and get to know others better. I invite you now to greet those sitting near you - and if you don’t know them, why don’t you introduce yourselves?

Sometimes we’re not good at keeping in touch with people who have been regulars at Mass who for whatever reason, are absent for a number of weeks. If we know them, how might we reach out to them and check that they are OK?

In recent years we’ve begun to put more effort in to the ministry of welcome –at this Mass there are always ‘welcomers’ at the back of church who do such a good job in welcoming people coming in to church – on all our behalf I would like to thank them for all that they do - we could always use more people to do this important ministry. There is still a lot of scope here – and your ideas and help would be greatly appreciated. Volunteers to meet and greet will be most welcome!

We need to welcome others warmly but we must also ensure that we respect their desire for privacy and take care that we are not intrusive or pushy. Above all hospitality means accepting people as they are and not trying to make them into our own image and likeness.