

## Thought for the week

Have you ever spotted a famous person? Did you go up and ask them for a selfie or an autograph, or were you too shy? Or perhaps you were unsure if it was them?

Some celebrities perhaps revel in people asking for selfies and autographs when they are out and about, whereas others probably wish they could hide or wear a mask, particularly if they are on holiday with their families. Being recognised is not always a comfortable situation. The same can be true for teachers if they meet one of their pupils while out shopping. Who feels more embarrassed, the student or the teacher? Might these interactions go more smoothly if we recognise the other person as human, like us, people in need of welcome, gentleness, privacy or respect.

Today's short Gospel reading comes at the end of Jesus' instructions for mission, which he gave to his disciples. Jesus says that, if they are welcomed, it is the equivalent of welcoming God. The same is true for us. When we welcome others into our midst we are welcoming God, whose image we can see in everyone we meet. It doesn't have to be an elaborate welcome. Something as simple as providing someone with basic needs (a cup of cold water) is a demonstration of love and respect. 'These little ones' that Jesus mentions doesn't just mean the children, but the marginalised, the elderly, or those from minority groups – anyone, in fact, whom Roman or Jewish society did not rate highly.

Likewise, our contemporary values seem to struggle with 'otherness'. There seems to be a mismatch between accepting that everyone is different, while fearing the stranger in our midst. Living the Jesus way is counter-cultural in that it demands that we treat everyone with the same worth and value, whatever their status, nationality or orientation. Jesus teaches that everyone should be valued and recognised as highly as another because they are made in the image of God. Serving them means serving God. Even just remembering someone's name can bring them respect when otherwise they might go unnoticed. It is very frustrating to be called by the wrong name or have your name used informally in a formal situation, because our name is part of our identity and the essence of who we are. In the early days of her career, the tennis star Martina Navratilova got very frustrated with a Wimbledon umpire who couldn't pronounce her name. At one change of ends she was heard to say: 'Can't you get my name right?'

We can show respect to people simply by calling them by their preferred name in any particular situation.

So, our daily challenge is to recognise and acknowledge those around us who are being overlooked by others. Is there someone in your class who no-one plays with at break-time? Is there someone sleeping rough by the railway station entrance, or a person at work who never speaks to anyone? What 'cup of cold water' can we provide, or listening ear, or sandwich? Perhaps we can offer a friendly smile and invitation to join the game, or ask someone their name and then use it regularly when we pass them in the street?

Whatever we do, we can be sure that these small acts of faithfulness will not be unrecognised by God.

But Jesus's words don't just refer to our recognition of others. Part of being human is allowing others to minister to us on occasions. Allowing others to serve us can be just as gracious an act as serving someone else. This is another way of showing them respect: accepting their help.

Whether we are giving or receiving, Jesus tells us: 'you will receive a reward' – the reward of being known and loved intimately by God, no matter what. What greater reward could there be?