



You never forget the first person who welcomes you into a new environment. In 6th grade I started a new school. A boy named Gary sat behind me. “Hey kid, you can sit with us at lunch,” he said. I was no longer a stranger. I belonged. The rest was up to me.

I’m convinced that one of our best opportunities to be faithful to the gospel and one of our greatest responsibilities is to notice and to welcome visitors and those who are new to our parish family. Faith has a human face. Faith is received by hearing the Word of God but faith lives and grows in relationships and in community. Saint Paul said “greet one another with a holy kiss” (Romans 16:16). Pope Saint John Paul II used the word “solidarity.” Pope Francis calls it “accompaniment.” It is the mentality and attitude of setting an extra plate, and living in anticipation of who God will send to represent Him at the table. Hebrews 13:2 reminds us, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

Welcoming and accepting a new person is a gospel perspective. Our liturgical year, beginning with Advent and culminating with the Sacred Triduum, expresses the drama and conflicted response with which humanity welcomes, ignores or rejects the entrance of Jesus into our world.

This Advent I encourage us to “spiritually adopt” a soul who will be drawn to Church this Christmas. Our prayers will be a spiritual “red carpet,” opening a door of grace and friendship with Christ.

The ministry of greeting and welcoming is a charism for some but a calling for all of us. This Christmas, offer someone the gift of a smile, a handshake and the sharing of your name. You may be the one who will always be remembered by a friend of God.

- Fr. Jim