

2018 25th SUNDAY

It always interests me to watch the dynamic in families when I come as a visitor and we prepare to sit down at table. Almost inevitably there will be a competition among the children over who will sit beside me.

It is not because the children enjoy my sparkling conversation. It is not because they necessarily even like me all that much. It is all to do with the pecking-order among the children. As far as the oldest child is concerned it is just not on for a younger sibling to be allowed to sit beside me. And it is just pointless parents scolding the oldest child over this. An awareness of our place within the social groups which make up our lives, is built into us.

Schools recognise this by giving senior pupils privileges which younger pupils can aspire to as they grow older. Who sits in the beautiful Café at Campion College at Lunchtime- the Year 13 students or the Year 7 students? The senior worker in a firm will expect to have the desk with the best view and have first whack at the coffee machine at morning tea time. It is just the way things are.

This dynamic was ever-so obvious at the final Mass of the Priests' Assembly last Thursday. Cardinal Dew, with all the other Bishops at the Assembly, sat in the Sanctuary of the Church. The Priests were not in the Sanctuary- but were in the front seats of the Church. Behind them were the laity. It was a formal occasion and the seating arrangements reflected the status of the guests.

Leonardo da Vinci in his "Last Supper" depicts Jesus' inner circle of Apostles: Peter, John and James sitting directly to Jesus' right and left. Nobody has ever complained about this. It is the way things are.

However St. James, in our 2nd Reading, gives us a word of warning. He points out that the desire to attain status- to be in the place of honour- can be a poisoned fruit if it becomes a springboard to deadly jealousy and maliciousness. St. James says: "Wherever you find jealousy and ambition, there will be disharmony; and wicked things of every kind will be done."

Bishop Vincent Long, a Vietnamese Bishop who is the Bishop of Parramata, Sydney, spoke to our Priests' Assembly and was very much at one with St. James when he said to us: "Some Bishops, after they have ordained a young man as a priest, will kneel before the new priest and ask for his first blessing. I think that is a very bad idea. What is the bishop kneeling before him

saying to the new priest? Will the young man get an entirely wrong message and become a clerical monster?" Those were his words!!

In today's Gospel, the Apostles were walking along behind Jesus and-thinking that they were out of ear-shot- were having a colossal argument over who was most important in their group. The issue at stake may have been over who should walk directly behind Jesus as they entered their home-town of Capernaum. Obviously the discussion had become heated and harsh words had been spoken.

Jesus seized on the opportunity to speak to them on the whole issue of status. He made it ever so clear that human status is not the measure of a person's greatness in God's sight. "If anyone wants to be first in God's Kingdom, they must make themselves the servant of all."

On the Day of Judgement it will make no difference to God whether a person is a Bishop or a street-kid. What will be important- and what will give that person eternal status in heaven- is a person's kindness of heart.

In the early days of His ministry, Jesus spelt out a blue-print for eternal greatness. "Blessed are the humble of heart. Blessed are the gentle. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the peacemakers."

Blessed are you Dad- Bank Manager and *ever* so important- blessed are you when you wash the breakfast dishes and make the beds of your young children before leaving for work.

Blessed are you Mum- the Principal of a School- when you prepare nourishing, interesting meals for your family when you return home after a hectic day at School.

Blessed are you, sons and daughters, captains of your sports teams, when you do your household chores without fuss, without having to be asked.

Blessed are you, young women, *ever-so-beautiful*- sought after by untold young men, when you baby-sit for the stressing couple next door even though you had been invited to a party.

Blessed are you, older person, cultured and refined, when you pop in for a cup of tea with a lonely neighbour and listen patiently to his endless stories.

I sense that Jesus would have no problem with Cardinal John sitting on his teaching chair, surrounded by his brother Bishops at our Priests' Assembly. It was a human and good thing for our Bishops to be given the privilege of celebrating the Mass for us.

But Bishops are called to be shepherds; to be servants. Later that evening the Cardinal dropped everything he had planned to do to be at the bedside of

Msgr. Pat Ward as he lay dying. And it is well known that the Cardinal's first priority on visiting parishes is to visit the sick and the housebound of that particular parish. It is in serving those whom society normally forgets about, that Cardinal John will come to greatness in God's eyes; not by being Cardinal; upfront at the Priests' Assembly Mass.

It is in reaching out with love to the little and the forgotten of society- in Jesus' Name- that each one of us will become worthy of a place of honour at the Heavenly Banquet. It is through humble, loving service that we will receive the status in heaven owed to the oldest son or the oldest daughter.