

*“Courage! Do not be afraid.”* Children and teachers are back at school. Pope Francis and the bishops are preparing for a momentous Synod on the Family. As individuals we take up our daily tasks again with new vigour. As a parish we embark on a new round of catechesis, dialogue and outreach. As Isaiah says, and as Pope St John Paul II never tired of saying, *“Courage! Do not be afraid.”*

*“My brothers and sisters, do not try to combine faith in our glorified Lord with the making of distinctions between classes of people.”* Parts of North Africa and the Middle East are in meltdown. People are fleeing oppression, violence and poverty. They are our brothers and sisters. We must demonstrate care and compassion.

We share our world; we share Earlsdon and Chapelfields with people of other faiths and of no faith. We must respect what other people have to say. But we should not be shy of telling people about our faith. We are Catholic Christians. We should be proud of our faith and bear witness to it.

*They brought Jesus a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they asked him to lay his hand on him.* Bring the deaf and the dumb here. Bring the blind and the lame. Have faith in Jesus. Have faith in his gentle hands. Pray for healing. Know the power of the Holy Spirit.

What we must never forget is that our religion, our Catholic religion, is first and foremost a spiritual way. It's not just a nice club to belong to, a box to tick, or a convenient pressure group for peace and justice. It is a spiritual way, a contemplative way, a journey inwards and a journey outwards. *Look your God is coming.* Indeed he is here already. He is here in the scriptures. He is here in the Eucharist. He is here in our brother and sister. *He is coming to save you.*

*“Courage! Do not be afraid.”* To embark on this journey does take courage. To travel further on this journey takes even more courage. Entering into dialogue with other faiths takes courage. Caring for the sick takes courage. On Tuesday we will celebrate the birthday of our Blessed Lady. When the Angel Gabriel appeared to her and said, *“Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son.”* We, too, have won God's favour. We, too, are to conceive and bear a son. Jesus can and will be born in our lives, in our prayer, in our Eucharist.

*“Courage! Do not be afraid.”*