

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

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BE KIND, BE KIND, BE KIND!

The late Archbishop of New York, Cardinal John O'Connor was quite a formidable figure here in the Archdiocese of New York. One thing I am grateful to him for was that he ordained me a priest almost thirty years ago, on November 12, 1988. If you have ever been to an Ordination Mass, it is a very impressive ceremony.

Cardinal O'Connor lent his own particular style to the traditional rite. At the end of the Mass, he would point to the newly ordained men and always say, "Well, they're priests now!" But then he would give a piece of advice to the young priests who were just sallying forth into the ministry. The advice? "Be kind, be kind!" After thinking about it, the Cardinal was right on target. People do love kind priests!

Kindness should be something we all aspire to and not just the clergy. It seems though kindness is not often appreciated as a virtue anymore in our society. Perhaps being kind is often considered as a sign of weakness and yet it should not be! Kindness is really an extension of that central Christian virtue of charity which signifies love of neighbor.

In that regard, I heard a story about a priest by the name of Father Murphy. One Sunday, he got up and delivered a really great sermon about love, forgiveness, kindness and controlling one's anger. During the week, the priest who enjoyed building things, spent long hours constructing a wooden frame to hold cement for a new driveway. On Saturday he poured the cement and then went to the shed for a tool. On his return, he found a little boy from the neighborhood walking in the fresh cement!

Well. Father Murphy started yelling at this little boy. Just then a parishioner happened to pass by and heard him ranting and raving. "Father," the parishioner said, "What happened to the advice you gave in your homily last Sunday-love, patience, understanding, kindness?" The priest was chagrined and said "You know, it's far easier to love in the abstract than in the concrete!" How true! How difficult it is for us to be truly kind to others in the concrete situations of our own lives.

I was thinking of that story the other day when I was driving to a wake over in Brooklyn. Not familiar with the neighborhood, I momentarily hesitated at a light that had just turned green. Instantly, I was blasted out of my seat by a loud horn behind me and a guy gesturing not too politely. Well, I was angry but did not express the hot answer on my tongue! To be kind requires effort at times-it does not come easy to anyone of us.

Saint John Bosco who dealt with so many young people in his ministry once wrote this: "It took me years to be convinced of a great truth-it is easier to become angry than to restrain oneself..." That's the voice of experience!

We are now in the season of Lent and hopefully we are all doing some form of penance. Now penance does not mean kneeling on broken glass or fasting on bread and water! It could mean just being a little bit kinder and patient to those around us-our family members, co-workers, the people in line at the supermarket or the bank.

Kindness can be contagious. When we are surrounded by kindness and love, we feel a lot better ourselves. Then we can pass that kindness on to others and begin to understand their own needs and concerns and focus on our own. This Lent and every day of the year, let's take Cardinal O'Connor's advice and "be kind, be kind, be kind!"

Sincerely in Christ,
Father Jerome