

Let me begin by thanking Fr. Pat and the people of St. Pius X Parish for welcoming us and hosting us tonight! The spirit of welcome is the first action of the Holy Spirit to warm our hearts and help us to feel close to Christ. So, thank you!

My dear ambassadors, you are truly ambassadors for Christ! You have been with us for so many events during this past year, often working very quietly in the background. I have received so many compliments from many people about how smoothly our events happen, and how good they feel when they come to Archdiocesan events. Of course, this makes me very happy! But I know that behind the scenes I have little angels watching my back, and making sure everything goes well — and those little angels are you! You are the ones who make it happen! You are the ones who guide people to the right places, accompany those who are confused or elderly, and who make our guests feel so much at home. And so, I have a heart of gratitude for you!

Welcoming others is not so easy as it may seem. Sometimes the fear of others, or the demands of the situation may overwhelm us. To welcome another person is to encounter them in some particular way. We are not only saying “hello” to someone, or telling them that their meeting or group can be found down the hallway. No, we are doing much more. In the mystery of grace Christ is reaching out through us to His people. Your “hello” is not merely your own “hello,” but the greeting of Christ to one of His beloved daughters or sons.

Regarding the question of welcoming others, Our Holy Father, Pope Francis said, in January of last year:

“It’s not easy to put ourselves in another person’s shoes, especially those very different from us, and this can cause us to have doubts and fears,” Francis said.

“These fears are legitimate, based on doubts that are fully comprehensible from a human point of view. Having doubts and fears is not a sin.”

“The sin is to allow these fears to determine our responses, to limit our choices, to compromise respect and generosity, to feed hostility and rejection,” he continued. “The sin is to refuse to encounter the other, to encounter the different, to encounter the neighbor, when this is in fact a privileged opportunity to encounter the Lord.”

I ask you as ambassadors to consider this point of the Holy Father. Your work as an ambassador to others is a privileged opportunity to encounter the Lord, Himself, through another person. So, not only are you blessing others through your acts of welcome, but also, you are being blessed by them! You are encountering the Lord!

How often does the Lord come to us through the most unlikely people! Sometimes it happens through someone who is very old. Sometimes through a child. Sometimes through someone who needs extra help because of a disability. And sometimes through someone who looks lonely, lost, or afraid. We never know how the Lord will come to us. The story is told of St. Martin of Tours that he encountered a man once by the side of the road on a very cold day. For some reason, Martin was moved to share his tunic with this cold and lonely man who said not even a word to him. Healthy and strong, Martin continued his journey knowing that he would be safe and warm once he reached his destination. Later that night it was revealed to Martin in a dream that this lonely, cold man by the side of the road was Christ, himself.

I express my gratitude to each of you, tonight. We could not do what we do as an Archdiocese without you. But I also challenge you to remain

open to finding Christ in the other, and to know that you, too, are blessed
... even when you're just saying "hello!"