

Today I want to focus on a key word from today's gospel and shed some light on its translation. Jesus, embraces a child and says, "Whoever RECEIVES one child such as this in MY name RECEIVES ME..." THIS biblical translation uses the word "receives," a word that is pivotal to the core message of the gospel. But, in the New Living Translation, the word "welcomes" is used in its place. In Greek these words are synonyms. But when we swap them out, the sentence reads, "Whoever WELCOMES one child such as this in my name, WELCOMES me; and whoever welcomes me, WELCOMES not me, but the one who sent me."

"Receives" vs "welcomes." Receives has more of a mechanical feel to it. You might say, "I received an email from Fr. George." But, if he came to your home you might say, "I welcomed Fr. George into my home." WELCOMING comes from the heart. There's an intentional nature to "welcoming" that we don't pick up when we use the word "receiving."

Now, let's think of Jesus showing up at our doorstep, would we just receive him into your home, or would we WELCOME Him? Would you just open your door, or would you embrace Him, offer him a cold drink, and lead him to the best recliner in the house?

Another way to contrast "receiving" with "welcoming" comes from my work with engaged couples as we go through a list of 180 questions. I ask, "Are there certain behaviors or habits in your future spouse that sometimes annoy you?" More often than not, the answer is a definite "YES!" It seems, all people have SOME annoying habits, and as a Church we prefer couples recognize each other's imperfections PRIOR to their wedding date.

But the question for all of us is, do we just "receive" these shortcomings mechanically, or do we "welcome" them? In welcoming our spouse, or a child, as we see in the gospel, or a friend into our lives, we welcome ALL aspects of them, even the annoying parts. By welcoming the shortcomings of another, we are also welcoming the opportunity to become better, more resilient Christians, and to become more capable of welcoming the will of God in our lives.

Moving to today's reading from St James, we see a contrast between a spirit of "jealousy and selfish ambition" and a spirit of "wisdom." Wisdom is welcoming. St James calls it "Peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits." A welcoming person enjoys the good fruits that come from healthy, peaceful relationships with family, friends, and the outside world. We strive to welcome with open arms and an open heart. We open our doors, let the world come inside, and pray the Lord will give us the grace to make everyone feel at home.

St James also says, "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace." Peace is one of those fruits of wisdom. At every mass the priest repeats the words of Jesus saying, "Peace I leave you, my peace I give you." What can we do to take this gift of peace and develop our spirit of welcoming to cultivate peace in our world?

As St James parishioners, we can look for inspiration from our rich history of active outreach ministries. This week I learned of an example of our St James generosity from a co-worker who first connected with our parish almost 50 years ago. My co-worker, Khanh, was a 13-year-old boy, who fled persecution in Vietnam, with his grandmother and three brothers. They sailed in a boat and were eventually picked up by a merchant ship and brought to the US. His parents and one brother were left behind and he was 28 by the time his family was finally reunited.

In 1975 President Ford set up a task force to settle 130,000 Vietnamese refugees fleeing persecution from Vietnamese government. Khanh's family was transported to one of the four refugee staging sites in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. After four months, St James sponsored them, and they relocated to Solana Beach.

A parishioner, Giles Schmidt, welcomed the refugees into his home for a few weeks while the parish arranged to rent an apartment for the family. Khanh and his relatives would walk over to attend Mass every Sunday. And every weekend, St James parishioners, Peggy Strengs or Clare Mulligan, took the family grocery shopping once a week. St James provided a \$50 food allowance for the family of five. Khanh said the food was simple, rice, beans, milk, eggs, etc. But they always had enough. Khanh walked to Earl Warren Junior High school and his older brother took an early morning job at the local donut shop before school started.

A second Vietnamese family, a mother and a son, also sponsored by St. James, moved into the apartment complex and eventually, out of loneliness, shared Khanh's family's apartment where seven people lived in two rooms. Khanh said they didn't mind sharing the apartment. It seems they received a welcoming spirit from St James and passed it along to their countrymen.

After a year and a half, Khanh's family moved to Kearny Mesa, and he attended high school. He went on to receive a degree in computer science from San Diego State University and spent the next 40 years working as a defense contractor writing software for our military and raising his own family.

It's hard to describe just how excited and grateful Khanh was when he realized I was a deacon at St James. He openly shared his story and emphasized how much it meant for St James to welcome his struggling family during this critical time after coming to the United States.

We never know how our acts of kindness and welcoming will impact the lives of others. But as we saw with Khanh and his family, the impact can be life changing! When we welcome God's will, He makes sure our efforts count, just like the efforts of the apostles and early disciples who gave their lives to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth.

So, what part of God's will are we being asked to welcome today? This week, let's be on the lookout for Jesus, knocking at our door unexpectedly, and welcome Him inside our homes and inside our hearts, where together we can make life-changing impacts.