

## **In praise of kindness**

The person I am writing about today will not know the impact she had. One of the beauties of kindness is that it has a hidden and understated quality as it is delivered and yet it leaves an indelible mark on the recipient.

I want to tell you about a nurse who, by her kindness, made a big difference to me, as an anxious father of an ill child. At such times you discover again what gratefulness is. You discover again how the smallest of things makes a big difference. You discover again how impatient you can be. You discover again how your priorities can shift in an instant where health and life are concerned.

It all began the night before Back to Church Sunday. At 9.30pm I was just thinking about all the preparations and people involved and looking forward to the following morning, the service, the meal and the fun. By 10pm all that anticipation was out of the window, almost turned to dust. By 11pm we were rushing to hospital with our daughter in great discomfort.

For the next 72 hours nothing else mattered. As those of you who have had times in hospital will know, time seems to take on a different dimension. As a patient you feel helpless enough, handed over to others - you are done to, cared for. Action happens around you. You are passive. And as a family member you feel even more helpless, an onlooker even.

While all the staff we came across were competent, concerned and caring, something seemed missing. And it was only when we met it we realised what we had missed. It was kindness. What was the nature of this kindness?

Firstly, it was kindness with a listening ear. 'No-one is really telling us what's going on?' was my complaint as another stab of pain gripped Isobel. Rather than brush me off by saying the surgeons would see me the following morning on ward rounds, the nurse took time to go through her notes. She calmly guided me through the last 24 hours of medical assessment.

Secondly, it was a kindness that seemed to have time even though it was clear she had many other demands. This gave her the opportunity to be attentive and spot things that others had not really spotted. She got Isobel a fan to cool her. They say about great footballers that they are the players

who, in the heat of the game, can somehow read the game as if in slow motion without slowing down. She somehow gave space.

Thirdly, it was a kindness that made an extra effort and took action. She bleeped a surgeon to come and examine Isobel and speak and explain. This was not something she necessarily had to do. And it was not because I was being pushy. She just did.

Somehow, whenever that particular nurse was on the ward over the next couple of days I felt that Isobel was safe and that there was an air of calm and quiet efficiency.

Kindness is not just a comforting word or smile. It is about having a listening ear, attentiveness and taking appropriate action.

Loving kindness is often a word used to describe the nature of God and an attribute of God we can mirror. In Paul's hymn in praise of love he says: "Love is patient, love is kind..." (I Corinthians 13.4). Again, in his letter to the Galatians he calls it a 'fruit of the Spirit' (Galatians 5.22).

Look out for such fruits of God this month. And as the pace of life ratchets up in the busy-ness, demands and expectations of your particular walk of life start to hem you in, then practice timely kindness. Be kind and attentive to others and yourself. You too may never know the impact you have had.

\* Finally, I want to say how grateful we are to all the kindnesses shown us that weekend and after by many of the community of St Hilda's.