

Something to think about: 14 August 2011

Getting to know you

There is something very comfortable when the local panel-beater meets you in the garden at 7.30 in the morning, just after you have been walking, and reminds you he said, last year, that he would prune the fig tree... and "will it be OK in the next day or two because now is good and the weather is just right?" He knows about fig trees, because he comes from a part of the world where every garden had fig trees and everyone learned to care for them. Earlier in the year he beat the wrinkles out of my car and I gave him some figs and we had time to talk a bit. There is something about this exchange of goods and skills that helps you to get to know your neighbours and strengthens community networks. It set me wondering how else we might go about getting to know the neighbours better. It is easy to go on day by day saying hello to the people you know already, but much more difficult to introduce yourself to the rest and find out who they are and what makes them tick, as we say. We don't often stop long enough to say more than "Hello, how are you?" Even at church on a Sunday morning I find it difficult to really talk with people in ways that are satisfying exchanges. There is not the time to focus on a one-to-one conversation and there are always others to connect with, albeit briefly. Conversation takes time; it is an art that I often feel we are losing. We are great at exchanging information - we all have heaps of that these days - but we seldom have the time to listen while someone finds their voice and the confidence to share what is deep in their heart, or tell a story drawn from their life experience. Part of the traditional expectation of priests was they had time to listen and had developed the art of conversation. I need to make time to practice the art of conversation. I am guessing most of us do, even with our partners. Is there anyone who would like a cup of tea and has the time to practice with me?