

Settling in is unsettling

When I used to go home on vacation, the neighbors would ask me two questions, after they welcomed me home. First, they would ask, “When did you come home?” and secondly, they would ask, “When are you going back?” The second question might seem a bit harsh at the outset but, for the questioner, the question meant, how long can we enjoy your company, or, if one was not too amenable to them, how long do we have to put up with you.

When I arrived home in late January to begin my vacation, which is really my retirement, if someone asked me the second question, my answer would have to be open-ended. Such an answer could be as unsettling as a host family finding out that their obnoxious guests were staying indefinitely.

I have already received several emails from former parishioners and others asking how I am “settling into my retirement.” Such emails began to appear only after a week of my retirement. Amid jet lag, getting accustomed to different food, different customs, one does not settle into retirement in a week.

As yet, I have not celebrated a public Mass in my home parish. On my first weekend at home, I attended Mass at a parish in Dublin. It brought back memories of attending a Mass in another church seven years earlier. Toward the end of that Mass, my then seven year old niece leaned over to me and whispered, “Will it be over soon?” My next Mass was a simple family Mass in the living room, celebrated for my sister who has cancer.

As I sit and pen this column, I listen to the gale force winds howling outside as it pushes the rain against my living room windows. I do not have any appointments. I do not have any funerals. I do not have any unexpected guests dropping in. I do not have to sign any checks or pay any bills right now. I do not have to troubleshoot any on the blink air conditioning system. Yes, I don’t have to worry about my own air conditioning system. It is non-existent. I do not have to go to the bank. All I do is sit in my chair and watch the traffic go by as it sprays water from side to side.

I have heard lots of stories of men who retire and frustrate their wives in the process. Such men stay at home and get in the way of their wives as they go about their usual daily tasks. I know that a retired husband is a wife's full time job! I have no wife to complicate her life. I will just have to be content to be my own worst critic.

Of course, I have heard of stories of men who, on retiring, just became sad and lonely persons because they had not developed any creative outlets to be used in their retirement. I have a few that will take root especially in the spring. Then, I will have something else to cultivate with my time.

I also expect to receive the shipment of my “stuff” from Mississippi within the next two weeks. That should afford me the opportunity to rearrange my home and grace it with a more personal touch. That should “occupy” my retirement with an opportunity to organize and rearrange my home, rather than occupy my chair and rearrange my girth instead.

I know that retirement has its ups and downs. Basically, I can get up when I want to, and can lie down when I want to. I know I don’t have to be getting up at 3 a.m. in the morning to ride a bike through the countryside. If I did, some professionals would come and put me in a straight jacket and carry me off to a hospital where everyone knows they are normal.

Maybe, I need to ponder some more Will Rogers reflection on retirement when he said, “half our life is spent trying to find something to do with the time we have rushed through life trying to save.”

I hope I have lots of time saved to do the things I have put off doing for the first part of my life. If I do find that time, there might be another column from across the pond.