

Are you being served?

Following a recent trip to Mississippi, I received an email from an airline asking me for feedback from my return flight. The email informed me that my feedback was important in helping the airline to evaluate and possibly improve its service.

First of all, I was intrigued that the airline referred to the traveller, not as a “passenger” but as a “Guest.” How interesting, I thought. Obviously, the airline wanted me to feel special and an honoured and privileged person who would be treated royally by them.

Seeing that feedback was so important to them from a “guest,” I decided to fill out the feedback survey. I was to rate a multiplicity of questions from “0” being “not at all” to “10” being “excellent.” Questions varied from boarding process, seat assignment and comfort, attitude of staff, cleanliness of the aircraft, announcements, on time departure and schedule, meals and its service, as well as some other areas.

I filled out the feedback survey as honestly as I could but, at the same time, I wondered if it would make any difference. After all, I could be a disgruntled guest who was having a bad day and took out my frustrations on my guest airline. Anyway, my answers were not impressive. All my responses were in the “0” to “1” range with two responses in the “2” range.

While in Mississippi, I went to a well-known electronics store. On entering, I was greeted with, “Welcome to X” by a gentleman who had positioned himself close to the entry door. I really felt pretty special and welcome. I began to browse around the store and was approached again; this time by a different person. She had my shopping welfare in mind and said, “Is there anything I can help you with?” I replied, “I am just browsing for the moment.” She responded. “We are here to serve you. If there is anything we can do for you or help you in any way, please do not hesitate to ask.”

Savouring the attention, I found what I wanted and brought it to the checkout counter, beaming with the attention that was lavished upon me since my arrival in the store.

Luckily, there was no one in line at the counter. The tall lady took my purchase, scanned it and uttered her first words, “That will be...” She shoved out her hand as if, to say; give me the money and disappear. She didn’t even look at me. I began to count out the exact cost as I didn’t want to carry loose coins back to Ireland. She kept looking away while her empty hand was still outstretched. I paid the exact amount of the purchase and disappeared from the store without a comment from the cashier or myself.

I returned to Ireland with my survey experience in mind as well as my encounters and non-encounters at the well-known electronic store.

I began to put together some thoughts for a homily for the following Sunday. Ironically, both of my experiences fed into the message and challenges presented by the readings. The first reading from Isaiah reminded me of the Suffering Servant, being crushed as he serve humanity by taking upon himself their sins. The gospel from Mark reminded me of greatness, not greatness in positions of authority or prominence, but in the greatness that really matters, the greatness of service.

I am reminded of the British, sarcastic comedy series of the 1970’s and 1980’s, “Are you being served?” It revolves around the story of several personalities who work at Grace Brothers Department Store. The employees drive each other crazy during their free time. The show is full of sexual innuendos, slapstick, while parodying the English class system.

I doubt if I will hear back from the airline in question about my poor review. I still wonder if my response will make any difference to the mentality, outlook and approach of my “Guest” airline. I would hope it would.

Regarding the conflicting messages I received in that well-known electronic store in Mississippi, will I ever go back to it, if, perchance, I return to Mississippi for another visit? I doubt it!

Maybe, the comedy series, “Are you being served?” holds up a mirror to our face to allowing us, even in an exaggerated way, to examine our attitudes to service.

Still, I do know that the challenge that really matters in the long run is the one from the gospel that reminds us that he “came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for sin.”