

St Phoebe reflection on Romans 16:1-16
by Nora Bondi

It seems that in St Paul's work to build the church, he certainly encountered a whole bunch of people...with varying levels of difficult names to pronounce.

I was drawn to this passage, NOT only because of the evidence of prominence and respect given to the remarkable Phoebe OR because so many women are described with leadership titles OR even because there are so many roles, income levels and diverse members of society that Paul clearly notes as contributing to the church.....ALL of those are reason enough to dive further into this passage of hard-to-pronounce names.....BUT I was drawn to it because each of the names are given **value and appreciation and encouragement to be welcomed in**. "Greet one another with a holy kiss".

To be **named, valued, appreciated and welcomed** is such a gift. I have received this gift time and again and do my very best to give it to others. My husband and I joined this parish in 2004 and began having children in 2011 - so we'd been around for many years before the haggard days of dragging babies and toddlers to Sunday morning Mass with varying levels of success in getting out the door on time. I remember vividly coming (late) when Hannah was just 2 and Johnny was an infant (and Noah years away from being born). I don't think we'd been to Mass in several weeks and afterwards, several parishioners greeted us by name and told us how very glad they were to see us and our children. They recognized the work it took to get out the door and into the pews with little ones in tow - the bags of snacks & diapers, the plush Noah's Ark set, the books, the whispers of explanation about what was going on during the Mass. They praised our efforts, valued our parenting work and welcomed our presence. I remember leaving that day in tears of gratitude, feeling **valued and appreciated and welcomed** as part of this community.

I do my best to give that gift to the children of our parish when I do kids' liturgy. It was a compliment of great significance to me when a fellow leader remarked on how well I knew the kids' names. I want our parish children to feel that feeling of **value and appreciation and welcome** - to feel like they belong - and are valued here. Their bodies are wiggly but their hearts are pure - to hear their intercessions every week is truly a holy honor. We pray for everything from deceased pets to the success of the Bears - but also for laid off parents, for victims of gun violence, for end to wars and for peace - all with the same fervor and purity.

I know very deeply that it often does not feel like we, particularly women, are **valued, appreciated or welcomed** in our efforts to build a better church. But today I am grateful for the work of so many who have given me a church to guide me. For Phoebe, for Therese of Lisieux, for Mother Teresa and for Dorothy Day. And for those who have gathered here in my parishioner lifetime - particularly for what it means to my children. That my sons and daughter know the names and the value of those who work NOW to live church - that we knew Marion and honor her legacy as one who pastored us. That we know Cynthia and her welcome of Johnny to the ministry of lectors. That we know Pat and her welcome of Noah and Hannah to altar servers and more. That we know Sr Christina.... and Rhian and Katie and Mary and Marie and Niki and Michelle and so many more - who've been their catechists, their teachers, their prophets - OUR examples of a living church. May we greet one another with a kiss of gratitude for this holy work.