

Going Swimming and The Right Attitude

Father Paul - September 2016

How many of you went swimming since we last met? How many in the sea? Visualise it. Your friends. Having fun. The surroundings – in whatever country.

I'm a really bad swimmer, for reasons too dangerous to discuss in front of witnesses. But this summer I went every morning. It was mid-winter where I was, but I went every morning, for fitness, and later on, in the Mediterranean and Atlantic, for pleasure. Think about this, but do not visualise. I don't want anyone psychologically scarred as term begins.



When swimming, we play around with our friends. You do not have to swim one length if you don't want. You can have fun messing about, annoy lots of people if you feel inclined, and then go home. You will feel good, be cleaner, have had a good laugh, and maybe improve your social life one way or another. But regular visits of this kind will not build what you need if suddenly confronted by someone drowning, or, God forbid, if you go over the side of a sinking ship. Not at all.

Perhaps I'm talking about swimming with the Olympics in mind. Remember Michael Phelps ending his Games career with all those golds? And those amazing divers?

At the pool I attended, even in winter, lots of people your age were there at the crack of dawn. Like Phelps and others at their age, they headed straight for the lanes. They slid in and got going. Trainers lurked nearby, men or women watching over one, two, a dozen swimmers. Occasionally they shouted to correct breathing, kicking, strokes, and speed.

Many of the children, men or women training rapidly got up to an amazing number of lengths. They developed muscle tone and technique. Slung by accident into the ocean, their survival chances would be more than yours or mine. Faced with a human being in difficulty, they have gone beyond their own survival to have lots of capacity left over. I especially liked the event when people were in the open sea. The French word for it is interesting – to swim in the wide ocean is to swim in 'alive water'.

At the pool, it's a matter of mental attitude and choice whether you tool around having fun, or start training, or do both. At school this week and for thirty-seven weeks to come, it's the same. If you hang out with no deliberate choices, you may have fun now and then, but you will be left behind by those who choose differently, in this school, and every other national school. All of us have come this morning for the next stage of your education. You and I are what we repeat. What you choose to repeat day by day, shapes your GCSE results, your A-Levels, and above all, whether employers and admissions officers will like your face in a few years' time. Your teachers, having worked already for a week preparing for your arrival, hope you will be a lanes person.

Be a lanes person then, for your own sake, for your future, for your teachers, for those who sent you here. Be a lanes person for the new Headmaster and this excellent new stage in the School's life. Get ready to swim in the 'alive water' of life after school. Pick yourself up and go for it today and every day. Best for it from me!