

Along the track

Being Big Hearted

Jesus was a great story-teller. He had the right words for the right occasion, the right story for the right question, the right message. He was approached by a very sincere questioner: "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" Not an outlandish question – we probably all want to know that. Jesus told him: "If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." The next question is a bit of a surprise! "Which ones?" the man asked. Is there a choice about the ones we keep! Jesus replied, "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother, and love your neighbour as yourself." But I do that already, the man said. Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

And, Matthew tells us, that response disappointed him and he went away, not just because he was rich and giving all that away was a bit much, but something more was expected. Surely what he was doing was enough!! He wasn't happy with what Jesus said – he was expecting praise for just following the rules. But for Jesus, eternal life isn't just about following the rules, it is rather about why we follow them and how, about how we work at creating a better world. Following the commandments is about trying to create a fairer, most just, more loving world, about finding happiness and fulfilment by helping others to do the same. In the words of Pope Francis, we are involved in 'the struggle to become big-hearted.'

So when Jesus asks this man to give everything away and follow him, he meant it.

Following rules is usually not all that hard, no matter what our motive for doing so. Sometimes too faith is presented as a series of propositions to which people are expected to give their assent. And that's enough. That's not all that difficult. But both are so much richer than that - both the commandments and faith call us into relationship, with God and with each other. That's what Jesus was asking of this man – have the courage to be open and trust that God loves you and seeks you out, even in the most unlikely of places at the unlikely times. You may have kept all the commandments but have you responded to the loving invitation God offers by being big hearted?

When Fr Bob Maguire died the papers and the other media were full of stories about him, about his generosity of spirit, about his love for others, about his work for justice and fairness. He had a huge impact on people of faith and those who profess none. 'You don't have to like people to love them', he often said and Bob certainly did love people, especially the outcaste, those that might even be called 'unlovely'. He had a strong belief that God was already at work in the life of the other person no matter how hard that may have been to recognise sometimes. Everyone was important to him. The lost and broken were his best friends, but so were the rich and poor, powerful and powerless, saint and sinner, So many people wrote that, when you met Bob, you went away a better person. Not a bad legacy. Perhaps that's what Jesus was trying to tell this man who came to question him.

The commandments call us to be soul people, people of sensitivity to others and their needs, a call to overcome pettiness and our need to be judgemental, our need to tell God what should be done and who should or should not be forgiven. The commandments challenge us to love those we may not like, those we may find we cannot agree with or why they may see the world in different ways than I do. The commandments challenge us to ask, what can I do to make this world a better, more loving, more sympathetic and less judgemental place? What can I do to make people feel safer, more at peace, more at one with themselves and each other?

At the end of each day, how would you answer the question "Is the world a better place for what I did, for what I thought or said today?" We are not expected to be Bob Maguire's but we can make a difference everyday if we choose to.

Regards
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