

Along the track

The Choices I Make

It is a sad fact that none of us will get through life without facing criticism, sometimes fair, sometimes unjustified, we will face opposition, we will be misunderstood, and our motives or actions may be judged poorly for reasons often unknown to us.

We all possess the capacity to hurt one another. Sometimes we hurt others by taking out our own aggression and frustration on them or we may simply neglect small courtesies or fail to keep promises. We can sometimes rather thoughtlessly ignore what is important to others because it is not important to us. That's one of the reasons why we ask forgiveness at the start of Mass for "what I have done and what I have failed to do."

There are a number of reasons why we behave in such a manner – we may be thoughtless or 'care less', we may be so self-absorbed that we cannot perceive what effect our behaviour is having on others. We can fail deliberately or unwittingly, to take their ideas or feelings seriously. We may feel that what we are doing is more important – that what others are doing or saying doesn't really matter all that much anyway. When we find ourselves on shaky ground, it is sometimes easier to hit out, to be nasty or domineering to cover for our own weakness or insecurity. We try to compensate or cover up our own inadequacies. Or perhaps there may be people you find difficult to get on with, they rub you up the wrong way. It is worth asking why? Does that tell you anything about yourself perhaps?

When Jesus said, love one another as I have loved you, He meant it! Sometimes we focus on Jesus' death for us as the ultimate measure of how we should love but few of us will be asked to give our lives in such a way. Rather, loving one another as Jesus loved us is about our daily choices, and how they are a measure of our love. That was the image Jesus put before us about our last judgement – I was hungry and you fed me, I was lonely and you visited me, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I had no clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. (Matt 25)

Every day is a gift, not just because we are alive but every day offers us choices, opportunities, chances to make a difference. We can choose to make the world around us just that much better today, or we can choose not to. We have the power to encourage and heal, to treat others thoughtfully and with kindness but we can also choose to hurt others, to put them down, to take the negative path.

The choices I make each day, no matter how insignificant they may feel at the time, can make a difference. When we go back over our day, were there moments today when I opened my mouth and said something mean or destructive when I could have chosen to be helpful and encouraging. Did I withhold something just because I didn't want to make life easier for the other person or was I generous; did I give way to a bad mood or did I get over it; did I destroy someone's happiness, or did I enhance it? Was I negative, or did I stop and think and offer something constructive, even if it was just a word of encouragement, a thank you.

There will be times when we don't agree with another person or what is being said or proposed. There are times when we should speak up, when we do need to offer an alternative, a correction even. But that is when the 'why' and the 'how' become important. Why do I need to do this and what is the best way I can make this interaction positive and life-giving.

The world we want to live in, the world we want for our children begins in the minds and hearts of individuals, in the belief that we can make a positive difference. It begins when I decide that I want to be a person who unites rather than divides, when I decide that I want to be a person who can bring peace rather than mistrust, a person who is generous in mind and heart, it starts when I am willing to listen, really listen, and when I work to be a person at home with myself, and consequently at home with others.

Regards
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