

## **Tuesday Reflection 24 November**

Last week we were looking at the role played in our lives by mistakes and failures, and suggested that they could be seen as opportunities for learning and growth. That rather leaves open the question of what is a 'mistake' or 'failure'.

Very often, our actions are the results of decisions we make; we have reasons for acting (or not acting) the way we do, so perhaps we need to consider the bases for our decisions.

There are those who would argue that 'mistakes' or 'failures' are a consequence of 'not following the rules', but here I remember a very wise colleague of mine once saying that 'Rules are for the guidance of the wise and obedience by idiots'.

We are relational beings; we do not live in a vacuum. Everything we do (or do not do) affects others, so perhaps one criterion for defining a 'mistake' or 'failure' could be the impact our action (or inaction) has on others.

The priest and the Levite do not come off well in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, but Jesus's audience, who were well acquainted with the laws on ritual purity, would have known that for a priest or a Levite to touch a human body or become contaminated by blood would have rendered them ritually unclean, and thus unable to perform their religious duties, in other words, they prioritised the Law. Difficult for us to grasp?

Imagine a scenario where you are just getting ready to leave for Mass and a neighbour comes in distress begging for help. To stop and help would mean that you would miss Mass and thus neglect your religious obligations. Probably quite an easy dilemma to solve. Try this one: you are on the way to Mass and see a total stranger collapse in the street. What do you do? (Perhaps whip out your phone, call 999, report the incident and carry on your way?). I ask myself how I would react in these scenarios if I were on the way to church to preside at a Eucharistic Service and knew that there were 10 people waiting for me. Or how would an anaesthetist react who was on her way to assist at a life-or-death operation? In our lives we are constantly being called upon to weigh up one course of action against another.

Much of Jesus's teaching is concerned with the dilemma of 'Law versus Love', and Martin Luther King summed up the lesson of the Parable of the Good Samaritan in the following words: "The first question the priest asked, the first question that the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But then the Samaritan came by and reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"

Which of these questions would we ask ourselves in a similar situation?

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