

+ In the name....

I must tell you about a story I heard the other day about a priest – his name was Father O'Sullivan. One day the priest stared intently from the pulpit and then he suddenly launched into an almighty tirade.

'Let me tell you. Everyone in this parish is going to hell! Hell, I tell you.'

Stunned silence - open mouths - fear filled eyes – except for one little old man who was - laughing.

The priest bellowed again: 'I tell you, make no mistake. The whole parish is going to hell. Every man, woman and child is going to hell. No escape, you are all doomed.' Silence - well, almost. All were stunned except the little old man who was by now in hysterics.

'Didn't you hear me?' said Father O'Sullivan. 'I said the whole parish is going to hell – including you, you strange little old man.'

'I heard you Father,' said the old man, 'but I'm from the parish next door!' How prudent for the 'strange little old man' to have wandered from his own parish that day!

Since Ash Wednesday I hope that we have all been asking ourselves how best to prepare for the joyful mysteries of Easter. If our Easter celebrations are to be genuine then our Lenten call of preparation is to imitate Christ in the wilderness: such forethought is to be regarded as a prudent Lenten observance!

As the author of the Wisdom of Solomon indeed uttered, "If any one loves righteousness, her labours are virtues; for she teaches temperance and prudence, justice and courage; nothing in life is more profitable for men than these." So, we consider the 'Father' of all virtues today: that of prudence.

People who are wise and knowledgeable are prudent because they have insight and foresight. Indeed, in Proverbs we read: "The prudent man looks where he is going!" The cardinal virtue of prudence is a practical way of discerning the path of true goodness.

Such practical wisdom anticipates the future whereby a sound judgement is made and the careful path leading to such a goal is identified. In ethical terms, the end and the means to achieving such an end are the ways of prudence.

As we know, S. Thomas Aquinas was influenced by Aristotle and in his mighty *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas states: "Prudence is right reason in action." So then, prudence guides the judgement of conscience and as such we follow goodness as apposed to evil. Indeed, as Cicero commented: "Prudence is the knowledge of things to be sought, and those to be shunned."

Now, in our reading from Saint Paul's epistle to the Philippians, we read: "All I want is to know Christ and the power of His resurrection" – in other words, we are bidden to share the mind of Christ and come to experience the fullness of his redeeming love; yes, we are to be prudent in our pilgrimage of faith by knowing what matters most in life. We are to turn to Christ and avoid the darkness of hell which Fr. O'Sullivan was so caught up with in our opening story!

On this Passion Sunday we begin our Passiontide pilgrimage - a time set aside in Lent to concentrate our thoughts on the suffering of our Lord and Saviour. Christ Jesus emptied himself and took on the form of a human servant and he humbled himself and became obedient unto death on a cross.

Friends of S. Laurence, we are to imitate Christ – the suffering servant, the Crucified God. Jesus, as God made man, could easily have sought to accentuate his Divine nature and cling to equality with God with Father. Rather, our Lord empties Himself of such a form to share the full brokenness of humanity.

Just as Saint Paul wants to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, so we also must seek to live with the mind of Christ alive within us, such is the way of prudence.

Just as there can be no Easter Sunday without Good Friday, so we acknowledge that before we experience the unfading crown of glory we must walk the way of the Cross and wear the crown of thorns.

When we stand by a river we notice how the current dictates which way the water will flow. Eventually, the water will end up in the sea, that great ocean of mystery, all because of the current. And so it is for us, we are travelling down stream to God, in the hope that, one day, we will eventually rest in His love.

But just like the salmon, our sin takes us the other way - the wrong way and we battle against the current of the water, for we resist God's love and His purposes for our lives.....Instead of seeking new life, we seek the old life of sin: an imprudent path!

Holy Week is just around the corner and we're preparing to walk with Christ in the way of our salvation. The prudent pilgrimage we shall share with Christ will be agonising since our footsteps will become heavy because we shall be confronted with our sins.

So then, how do turn from sin and be faithful to imitating Christ? Well, today's Gospel gives us some direction concerning the grace of prudence.

A woman has been caught in adultery and just as the scribes and Pharisees begin to take up stones to kill her, Jesus says: "He who is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her". In other words, we are all sinners and we are all in need of receiving God's reconciling love, peace and justice.

Whilst Jesus denounces sin, he equally shows immense mercy toward sinners. Sin is a burden and it is a collective weight of darkness that clings heavy to our souls. Indeed, it is because of our sin that Jesus hangs upon the wood of the Cross.

Also, remember Christ's teaching about the log being in our own eye when we are bothering ourselves with the bit of sawdust in another person's eye. We are not to compare ourselves to anyone else but we are called in thanksgiving to turn to Him who first loved us and who Himself was without sin. It is Christ Jesus alone who can and who wants to grant pardon to us.

I can't let this moment pass to strongly implore you to humbly confess your sins to a priest within the seal of the Sacrament of Confession, as well as walk the Stations of the Cross: both are very good forms of preparation for Easter and allow vital self-examination of our vices.

Our Gospel ends with Jesus being left with the woman. S. Augustine has remarkably expressed the meaning of this dramatic encounter of great emotion by stating that only two things were left: misery and mercy. Our Lord's final words to the woman were: "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, do not sin anymore". In sureness, Jesus condemns the sin but not the sinner.

I cannot help but think whatever happened to the woman or indeed the man she was caught committing adultery with – there are no clues in the Gospels and maybe that is a good thing, in a strange way. This prudent encounter between Jesus and the naughty woman should lead each and every person in Long Eaton to carefully examine our conscience, especially in regards to how we view our fellow sinners and whether we know ourselves to be truly forgiven.

In this Passiontide, let us thank God for the virtue of prudence, that experiencing God's mercy lifting our misery, we may be faithful to Christ and so come to live His Risen Life. Amen.