**Feast of Blessed John Henry Newman 2011**

To say that we have free will or to espouse the virtues that can arise from freedom of choice doesn’t mean that some of the choices we make can be wrong or harmful to others or to ourselves and reputation. Choices have consequences, sometimes good, sometimes bad.

The various characters in today’s parable all exercise their freedom to choose. The king chooses to invite many people to share the feast at his son’s wedding. Those who were first on the guest-list choose not to accept for their different reasons. Some put their work first others chose to mistreat and kill the king’s messengers. The next tranche of guests did accept the invitation but one chose to attend without the appropriate dress. In the terms of this parable perhaps this was someone who couldn’t quite make up their minds, couldn’t entirely exercise free will, someone who hedged their bets.

They were physically present but their mind was elsewhere; and so, preoccupied by other things, they couldn’t commit themselves to the real purpose of the feast. As a consequence they were ejected from the banquet hall.

This is the kind of dilemma I can identify with. Making choices isn’t always easy. Entering a sweet shop as a boy was always exciting; but choosing which sweets to buy was a nightmare. You can imagine why my mum would try and navigate a way through Woolworths that didn’t take us past the pick and mix.

Indecision can be both wise and risky depending on the circumstances. It is wise not to jump to conclusions when we first meet someone but it can be dangerous to allow panic to get the better of us in dangerous situations.

Making the best choice is a skill we develop– by experience. Sometimes it is appropriate to use our instinct. Other situations require a more measured use of reason.

The choices associated with our life of faith are no different from our other life choices in this respect. In some situations we can be like a rabbit caught in the headlights, especially when life confronts us with uncomfortable realities. As adults we can choose to allow our faith to remain naïve or rigid in the face of such dilemmas and challenges or we can decide to deal with them boldly. What won’t help us grow is putting our heads in the sand or casting the responsibility on someone else.

Our patron Blessed John Henry Newman identified the dangers of such procrastination.

When it comes to dealing with the realities we face he advises: “Let us take things as we find them: let us not attempt to distort them into what they are not... We cannot make facts. All our wishing cannot change them. We must use them.”

Concerning the fact that we are free to make choices concerning the things that matter Newman reminds us that we are responsible for the choices we make.

He said: “We can believe what we choose [but at the same time] we are answerable for what we choose to believe”.

And aware that we sometimes shrink from reaching decisions he also points out that:

“A man would do nothing if he waited until he could do it so well that no one could find fault”.

The Gospel parable opens our understanding of how the choices we make and the manner in which we make them, reveal our truest motives. When we hold back from the choice to accept God’s invitation to the fullness of life, our lives and relationships shrivel under the weight of selfishness. On the other hand accepting the invitation to draw us closer to the God of love expands our minds and spirits as our relationships deepen and flourish.

To quote Newman one last time the decision to act boldly, with faith, hope and love in the choices we make demonstrates that “Growth is the only [real] evidence of life”.

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