

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [A]

Ecclesiasticus 15: 15 - 20

1 Corinthians 2: 6 - 10

Matthew 5: 17 - 37

“He has placed before you fire and water; stretch out your hand for whichever you choose.”

Ecclesiasticus 15: 16

In this life we have so many choices; and in the 60 years I've walked this earth, they've increased beyond our wildest dreams.

But with choice comes responsibility.

We're not to be like children let loose in 'Toys 'R Us' to grasp whatever takes our fancy without any thought for the consequences.

The Lord says: “If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice.” Ecclesiasticus 15: 15

To choose between 'fire and water:' to choose between right, and wrong

Fire, that will consume us; or water that cleanse, and heal us.

Yet how extremely difficult it is to choose, and be faithful to, the Lord's ways!!

But, if we do; He promises us through the words of Paul in the second reading, that we'll behold:

“What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard,

and what no human mind has conceived' - the things God has prepared for those who love him.”

1 Cor. 2: 9 (Is. 64: 4)

Just after Christmas I went to the New Theatre to see the stage production of 'The Sound Of Music.'

It's very different to the film with Julie Andrews which, to me anyhow, is a bit sugary, and doesn't do justice to the world events, which shape the love that blossoms between Maria, and the Captain.

The story is set in Austria just before the 'Anschluss' when Hitler takes over Austria, and makes it part of his evil empire - the Third Reich.

The other main characters in the musical - apart from the children - are

Max Detweiler - a music impresario - and the Baroness, to whom the Captain is engaged.

The pivotal point in the story is when the Captain knows he has to choose between being true to his principles, because he loves his country; or save his neck by putting it under the Nazi jackboot.

He chooses to stay loyal to his principles, whilst Max, and the Baroness tell him not to be foolish.

It's inevitable that the Nazis are coming, so just put your head down, go with the flow, and survive.

As Max sings to the Baroness: “Caught in our gold plated chains are we, lost in our wealthy domains are we, trapped by our capital gains are we, how can love survive?”

Richard Rodgers & Oscar Hammerstein: 'How Can Love Survive?'

Will the love between the Captain, and the Baroness survive their diametrically opposed views...?

No.

But Max, and the Baroness are kindred spirits because, as they sing to each other after the Captain has left them, having made his choice: “So every star on every whirling planet, and every constellation in the sky, revolves around the centre of the universe, that lovely thing called, I.”

Richard Rodgers & Oscar Hammerstein: 'No Way To Stop It.'

The Baroness goes back to Vienna to her 'gold plated chains' that have ensnared her into believing she's the 'centre of the universe, that lovely thing called I.'

But, like the edelweiss emerging from under the snow, love begins to 'blossom and grow' between the Captain, and Maria as they discover they are drawn to one another: “With ties of love.”

Hos. 11: 4

They have seen in each other that wisdom, which Paul talks of in the second reading: “God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.” 1 Cor. 2: 7

Each of them, in their different ways, has been seeking the Lord's will for their lives.

Neither of them thinks that they are the centre of the universe. God is....

So The Sound Of Music is actually all about love, and redemption; as, indeed, all of Rodger's & Hammerstein's musicals are in their different ways.

The Captain, and Maria find their God-given destiny in their love for one another: and, because of the witness of their love, Max ultimately finds love, and redemption.

When the Nazis are closing in on the Von Trapp family he engineers their escape; and he's arrested, and taken away by the Nazis.

In the end, he chose to stretch out his hand, and plunge it into the cleansing water of the Lord's loving forgiveness.

"Before each person are life and death, and whichever one chooses will be given."

Ecclesiasticus 15: 17

Maria and the Captain, and Max chose to embrace life.

The Baroness chose to embrace death - the death of her soul - by being caught in her gold-plated chains; lost in her wealthy domains.

To choose life, in the sense that God wants us to choose it, is risky.

As Jesus says to us: "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it." Mt. 10: 39

The life the Lord wants us to choose isn't just a matter of living for a certain span of time, and then dying as Shakespeare reflects in his plays: "Threescore and ten I can remember well: within the volume of which time

I have seen hours dreadful and things strange." "For in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil."

William Shakespeare: Macbeth: Act 4 Scene 2 & Hamlet: Act 3 Scene 1

Now we can live beyond the 'three score and ten' of Shakespeare's time; and beyond the life-span envisaged by the Psalmist in his words: "The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; [but] they are soon gone, and we fly away." Ps. 90: 10

We may live to be 100; but do we know: "God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory." 1 Cor. 2: 7

When we listen to the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in today's Gospel it's quite easy to sink into a 'slough of despond,' and think that I'll never live up to what He's asking of me.

He's not standing on that mountain setting goals He knows we can't achieve, just to take perverse pleasure in watching us fail.

Remember the words of the Psalm?: "I lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Ps. 121: 1 - 2

He knows how frail, and weak we can be so He bends down to us to lift us up to Him.

Just as the Deacon says at the preparation of the gifts at the Eucharist: "By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity."

Just as the Lord described Himself to the Prophet Hosea: "I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them." Hos. 11: 4

Let's not fall into the trap of the Catholic guilt complex: thinking that I'll always fail to follow Jesus because I'm a weak, fallen person, and so become disheartened, and shrivel up spiritually. The Word of God assures us that Jesus is someone who: "Is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness." Heb. 5: 2

As we stand before Jesus, the Servant King, let's ask the Spirit to reveal to us: "'What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived' - the things God has prepared for those who love him.

[For] these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God." 1 Cor. 2: 9 (Is. 64: 4) & 10