

Memories..the power of memories...sad and happy..

Today is my late mother's birthday...16th August, so you can understand why I am speaking about the power of memories. Some dates (calendar ones !) are emotional charged...what date is happy or sad for you ?

Recall a happy memory.....not recent...years back.....as you recall the memory how do you feel....what does this recall do to feelings you have about yourself...right now. Warm feelings, a smile, quickening of the heart .

I was about ten. I was now allowed to ride my uncle's horse...till then it had been only the pony, but now a stallion. Whenever I see a horse, especially touch or ride one, the feelings I get now, are like I had in those childhood days. Warm, exciting, happy, youthful....I can bring back such positive, fun, feelings from those farm days just by taking a ride (now in a car !) in a rural part of Auckland. These positive happy memories also made me keen to give our children a pony, when we lived in a rural parish...

The association of location and experiences with positive warm feelings is something we value and can use at times when we need an emotional lift... "I always feel better when....." (where are such places or experiences for you ?)

We are not likely to shut out happy memories...but we do repress or try to shut out painful, sad experiences, perhaps repeating the familiar; " no use crying over spilt milk " or " it does no good to dwell on the past" kind of response.

The reasons for how we feel now, how we relate to others now, is usually multi faceted.....we are more complex than just single causes and we should be careful about simplistic cause and affect.

It is not only the recall of memory, but how we interpreted the past....what meaning we gave to an incident or the way we were treated, that affect us in the present. Exploring the meaning we attach to past memories is crucial for our ability to find release. With this process we may need professional help, from someone with both time and skills to give to us.

I recall several conversations with adults who told me that as children they were sent to boarding school....they were usually from farming families...so

boarding school was well intended...but, the meaning they attached to their parents action was:- “ I was not wanted... not loved”. We can misunderstand the best of intentions by others, or for various reasons distort their actions and words, but it is “the meaning we have given” to these matters that affects us, even years later.

We can recall a memory, but it is harder work discovering the meaning we attach to our memories...such meaning or significance we may have “ buried” in the “too painful basket”.

Jesus healing of the paralysed man (Mark 2: 1-12) illustrates release from painful, destructive memories....Jesus saw that for this man, memory of his sin (s) was the cause of his physical paralysis. Jesus, treating the underlying cause, says to the man, “your sins are forgiven”. Understanding the past, knowing what confines us “ to our bed”, so to speak, and being able to deal with past hurt, guilt or sadness, may bring release. I love the image invoked by Jesus words to the man, “ go home”. Healing from the past, can be thought of as helping people “ feel at home” with themselves and with others...being in a place within themselves of security and belonging. Of course, unlike the paralysed man, not all inner conditions are caused by our sins...others can sin against us.

Healing from past painful memories is not about removing the memory, we can't do that, but it is about understand the past and finding God's grace to live with the memory....to find a place to put the hurts, the sadness , the guilt and manage them.....not “move on” as is so naively said these days, but live with, understand the past and so be better able to overcome the past as this may affect us now.

Forgiving others plays a key part in finding some control over the past, but let me stress, as I have before....to forgive is not to approve of what has been done to us, forgive is not to pretend it did not happen (“crucifixion” is real and painful...forgiving others is setting us free from our response to the crucifixion and that may well include confronting people with what they have done to us.

Our mother's words, our fathers actions, our former husband or wife's demands and manipulations may spring up and set off our past hurts, that is often unavoidable...our memories remain.....but, then we have to choose

whether we will act on these feelings and reactions or in the moment of awareness, choose to react in a more constructive way. It is healthier if can recognize and understand what is causing these feelings and reactions, and constructively deal with them, but if not then we seek God's grace and energy to manage ourselves.

"Count to ten before I speak", is one way ! Delay the discussion, till I can get into a better frame of mind and not be reacting out of the past that is still resident within me. People often say..." I have no idea why I don't like this person, but I just do"a possible cause is that the person reminds them of someone in their past...and forgetting these past memories or refusing to face them, means the reaction remains a mystery. Even the physical shape or gestures (like a finger pointed at us) of people can be enough to remind us of our, " mother/ father/ headmaster/ authority figure" from the past

One of the causes for pain and sadness for many, is their abuse as a child...more common than we want to know or acknowledge. Again, it is the meaning children give to being abused that needs to be understood. Often the meaning they give is that they are to blame, that they did something to deserve this and they, therefore, sad to say, feel not only impure, but also guilty. Healing comes not just with the recall of the memory, but with working through the meaning they have attached to the memory and finding what to do with this...and that can be hard work, requiring much courage for both the hurt person and the "therapist".

Friends, could have been family, brought the man to Jesus. We sometimes need others to encourage us to seek help. We may need their presence with us, to help us feel safe in the presence of a therapist.

Equally, we need others with whom we can share our happy memories...in sharing with others our happy experiences gain strength within us. Instead of asking someone " how are you" (often just a throw away opening comment) try asking" how has the week been for you" or " anything important happened lately".

You may well know this story, but it is worth retelling. After heavy rain, there was flooding. Living in a low lying house, Jack moved on to his roof. A friend came by in a truck and offered to take him to safety. Being a man of faith, Jack

said, " God would rescue me" The waters rose, till water reached up to his roof..a friend came past in a boat and called out to Jack to "come NOW" but Jack insisted that God was rescue him, like he did Moses in the Red Sea...with water almost to his chin, Jack heard a helicopter above him and saw a rope dropped...but still Jack insisted God would rescue him. Jack drowned and went to heaven ! Jack complained to St Peter about God's care...St Peter replied..."God sent a man with a truck, then a boat and even a helicopter....what more could God do ? God's help is not confined to miracles from above, (though a few do happen from time to time) more often God acts through the hand, the smile, the friendship , the wisdom and knowledge of his servants (some of whom don't even realize they are being God's agents) ...the paralyzed man needed friends to bring him to Jesus...our church (local/worldwide) is one of the places where we are to find someone with a truck, a boat, even a helicopter....or can tell us where to find such help.