

Second Sunday Before Lent - 2009

...at the crossroads wisdom takes her stand;

A wonderful internet picture shows a cross roads in the Australian out back. There is a dilapidated signpost on which most of the details are missing.

There is however a rather newer sign on one of the four roads leading off the junction:

It reads:

"Choose carefully your rut...it may last for forty miles."

...at the crossroads wisdom takes her stand;

When I first read the sign I thought of those who feel themselves to have been a rut in their working life for forty years...

In Leicestershire and Rutland there are more signposts than I think I have ever seen before in any county in which I have had to do. They are very helpful pointing normally the right way to the right destination with normally the right number of miles to the destination attached...unlike in France!

I am a Francophile undoubtedly, but I do wish they would not put their motorway signposts a little further up the road and not on the actual junction. In my fast blue boy Skoda I could end up not finding the wished for Lille, but ascending the foothills of the Pyrenees by mistake!

In Hebrew the word for crossroads is a place of decision, and a place of decision which is often encountered, more often encountered in terms of life than we might at first think. It is also, as Proverbs suggests a place where wisdom is evident.

...at the crossroads wisdom takes her stand;

We often think that our 'crossroads of life' and on our life map only occur once or twice in a life span. We see crossroads places of major decision only which we would rather push away and happily bumble along normally taking the rough with the smooth.

The Hebrew would not have agreed with such a notion.

The Hebrew would have seen crossroads appearing far more often and in a host of different contexts.

The Hebrew would have been subject to change of direction much more readily and willingly than we would in our 21st century civilised society.

I suspect that if we looked into our own spirituality we might learn a little from our ancient ancestors of faith, whose 'father' was a wandering Aramean.

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Three brief examples will suffice, one expected two not.

In my experience there is what I would call a crossroads of the intellect.

After my first degree in music, I did a second degree in theology which had to be completed in two years, three years of work literally compressed into two.

David Jenkins, the famous one, taught us doctrine in a vastly telescope fashion, creation, the theme of today's readings in part being sorted in a week...well there are precedents... and we have to fill in the gaps. I remember saying to him that the first time round there did not seem too many gaps!

I was fascinated, but the fascination was 'all in my head' and not in my soul...that is until the College Holiday which was on Ascension day and we decided to climb Helvellyn in the Lake District. Eventually under a cloudless sky we reached the top. There were few sounds. We looked around and we could see the Scottish Borders, the Welsh Mountains and the Isle of Man all at the same time. A helicopter flew several hundreds of feet below us. I turned around again and again to view yet another glorious scene. The College Principal came up to me and said nothing. I said it says something for the teleological argument. He said to me in his usual disarming way "And the Lord said, can I cook or can't I?"

That was a huge signpost for me, the penny of the head had dropped at least partially into the heart. Christ had met me at this Crossroads of the intellect and in sheer beauty had asked the question:
"Can I cook or can't I?"

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Secondly, there is I think a Crossroads of the Soul. We struggle with prayer quite a lot...al of us do!

The further and more experienced we get on in the life of prayer the more difficult it seems to become. This is normal, the Lord not having to use our emotions to communicate to our souls.

My Spiritual Director said to me once when I moaned about being bored in prayer and easily distracted: "Fine.... be bored"!

But occasionally, irregularly, and without warning the Lord meets us in our silence and in our need and we have the feeling of 'bathing in the sunshine of God'.

We sit and knit before the Lord, but just occasionally he is there giving us the sign that things are well and we need to be patient and attentive to him.

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The Lord meets us at the crossroads of the soul and directs and encourages us.

Lastly, and more familiarly, there are the crossroads of vocation. My cross roads of vocation in contemplating ordination in my late teens came thick and fast.

On one arm of the signpost there was an airline pilot, on another a lawyer, on another a lecturer, on another an opera singer...on the last one was the priesthood. The latter was the one I didn't want to see and spiritually wanted to take a saw to the signpost and cut off that which said priesthood.

In some sense it was like those nightmares where you always end up at the same point with the same signpost in front of you. It was as if Stephen Foster wished to entertain any way and any direction, Eyres Monsell, Coalville, Melton Mowbrey, Hinckley, but it was Uppingham which would not go away, and eventually you take a tentative step along that road and you find Christ waiting *very* patiently. The mileage on that sign was paradoxically the shortest but with a few ruts along the way!

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So look forward to your crossroads, recognise them, remember they will appear more often than you think...and in different guises than perhaps you have first imagined.
But Christ is at them all, waiting in patience and in supreme and eternal love.

Canon Stephen Foster