

Everyday courage

At first she didn't think she had the skills. President of the Parents & Friends Association seemed like a daunting position to this particular mother. Having been out of the paid workforce for a number of years while raising three children, Sarah harboured doubts about her professional abilities. 'I guess I had lost confidence,' she explains. 'When the position was offered to me I had to take a very deep breath before I could say "Yes."'

But she did it. Not only did Sarah respond to the local school's needs, she handled the job with exceptional prowess. By the end of her three-year term the association was in great shape and Sarah was being praised for an 'outstanding presidency.' The task which had terrified her three years earlier had become a stepping stone to future possibilities.

Sarah's story leads me to think about courage. Courage: it is one of those words that speaks to my imagination. It conjures up images of valour. Of brave knights riding into battle. Of roaring lions and martyrs burnt at the stake. Of actions which are big, fearless and very public.

And yet, most of the time courage is expressed as a quiet, hidden, even hesitant, virtue. It simmers, it grows; it gradually builds upon itself as it is tried and tested against small, everyday fears. If we were to chant a litany of life's courageous deeds it might go something like this:

- It takes courage to step out beyond one's known limits and try something new.
- It takes courage to implement a life change, to take the first step of a new habit.
- It takes courage to act with integrity when others have little regard for the truth.
- It takes courage to do one's best when it is not apparent that anyone else cares.
- It takes courage to try again, knowing that last time you failed.
- It takes courage to enter a promising relationship, just as it takes courage to withdraw from a destructive one.
- It takes courage to speak well of another whom you know to be criticizing you.
- It takes courage to admit a wrong, correct a mistake and move on.
- It takes courage to maintain hope in the face of disappointment.
- It takes courage to have faith when one's beliefs are ridiculed.
- Sometimes it takes courage just to get out of bed in the morning, to grasp the gift of life when it would seem easier to curl up and die.

The test of courage confronts us every day. Each encounter presents us with a choice about something we believe in and someone we care about. I find it

a moving thought that those in our Christian ancestry whom we esteem as martyrs, unbeknown to themselves, were prepared over the course of their lives for their hour at Golgotha. Shaped by the cumulative effect of each small, apparently insignificant, courageous choice, day by day they became people capable of the ultimate sacrifice. And when they faced their hour, often frightened and alone, their litany of life choices formed a single chorus of faith to be sung by generations to come.

Against the backdrop of such public witness let's never underestimate the power of ordinary, everyday courage. •

