

## The Choice to Love

I was watching a movie about a group of men surviving the daily atrocities and indignities of life in a POW camp during World War II. The film depicted starving men sharing their food with dying friends, binding the wounds of enemy soldiers, and sacrificing their lives so that others might live. If a somewhat predictable script, the movie offered a timeless message of hope: We can be deprived of our possessions, our homes, our health, our loved ones – but no one can take away our inner freedom, our dignity as human beings made in the image of God and our decision to love.

Stories like this one always lead me to that same disturbing question: if I was one of those prisoners would I have the strength to maintain my human dignity in such appalling conditions? Would I discover the rich depths of my faith, or would I be shocked by my shallowness? Until the grim test is forced upon us, such questions remain unanswerable.

But then it also occurs to me that the same power of choice is available to us every day. After all, even when life is relatively comfortable and happy, we do not escape the ordinary burdens of fatigue, illness, loneliness or financial stress. We are confronted with the plight of our fellow human beings in need of love and assistance. We are challenged by the demands

of faith to witness and to evangelise. We are faced, too, with our own hurts and sins and temptations. In fact, even when life is going very, very well, it can be downright difficult!

In each of these difficult situations, we find ourselves making choices. The choice to love, or not; the decision to take an action that affirms our deepest values, or undermines them; to open ourselves to the dynamic mystery of God, or to burrow down into well-worn clichés that keep our little world manageable but meaningless.

The question is: can we approach the dispiriting obstacles of an ordinary day in the spirit of those prisoners of war? Perhaps that sounds overly-dramatic, and yet, when it all boils down, the same truth applies: We are not victims of circumstance, we are children of God. We share in the divine life of God. We are gifted with a freedom which no one can take from us. No one. Not family, not friends, not peer groups, not society, not even 'the church' in its human frailty.

Certainly, bound by the limitations of this life, this freedom does not always manifest itself as clearly as it should. Yet, even then, we are free to take the necessary steps towards healing those hurts, unraveling our sinful patterns and reclaiming our freedom.

Most of our gospel choices in life will be quiet ones, hidden ones. In fact, chances are, no one will even know of a heroic choice of ours and there won't

be any movies made about us. But our faith tells us that such choices count for everything in God's eyes, and through the connections of love they somehow, mysteriously, have bearing on the whole world.

Whether lived in war or peace, in pain or contentment, each day is a new day to reassert our will to live, to love and to be open to the Spirit of God. •

