

25th November 2020

Sorry

“To err is human; but contrition felt for the crime distinguishes the virtuous from the wicked.”

Vittorio Alfieri, Rosmunda Book III

Sorry! is a BBC TV series from the 1980s starring Ronnie Corbett as the unfortunate Timothy Lumsden, a librarian who lives at home with his domineering mother, Phyllis, and hen-pecked father, Sydney. Timothy is very shy around women, but longs to find love and leave home. One of the running gags is Sydney frequently shouting “Language, Timothy!” when his son has said something he’s misunderstood as being inappropriate or offensive, and Timothy responding with, “Sorry, father.”

But what if the put-upon Timothy had recognised where he might have got it wrong *before* his father had the chance to point it out? What about showing some contrition and saying “sorry” first?

At a funeral of an elderly lady, in the prayer before the final hymn, I asked God’s blessing on the family mourners – two sons, two daughters-in-law, and several grandchildren. I’d gone through the list of names and moved on to the closing hymn when I realised, to my horror, that I’d mixed the names up and paired each of the sons with the wrong wife. Disaster! Outside afterwards, the elder of the two sons came striding over to me with a deep scowl on his face. I decided to brazen it out before he took the chance to lambast me. “I got the names mixed up,” I said sheepishly. “I am *so* sorry for my mistake.” The man broke into a smile and said, “Not to worry, minister. The truth is, I’ve always fancied my brother’s wife!”

It’s hard to say “sorry” and to recognise the distress you might have caused. It’s great when your apology is accepted, or course, and, in words or attitude, someone offers you forgiveness. But it needs to begin with contrition, a recognition that a mistake has been made, an acceptance of your failings, and a willingness to be honest and to move on.

It’s easy to criticise. We all know that. And Timothy Lumsden had heard his father do *that* often enough. But let’s look at the speck in our eye before we point out the beam in someone else’s. Getting our “sorry” in first will always make a difference.

A prayer for today

Sorry, Lord. I got it wrong again. I need your smile of forgiveness. Thanks. Amen.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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