

4th October 2021

Choices

“The intellect of man is forced to choose ...”

W B Yeats, The Choice

Whisper this ... I used to be a heavy smoker. Excuses? I was young and didn't know better; the medical knowledge about the links between smoking and life-limiting disease wasn't as publicly known as it is now; smoking was the norm in all public places. But the truth is, I enjoyed smoking. It meant I was penniless at the end of every month (and there were two of us who smoked at home) because so much money was “going up in smoke”. But it was part of me, and something I liked. I was sponsored to stop smoking for 100 days by my congregation, the money raised going to Christian Aid. Thank God, I haven't touched a cigarette since.

All of this is in the public domain. But ... My wife had stopped smoking several months before me and we made a deal that I wouldn't smoke at home. So I didn't! I smoked in the parish. I smoked at meetings. I smoked when I went for a drink. I smoked in the Social Work office with colleagues. And here's the hidden confession ... I chose to make pastoral visits to homes of people I knew would be smoking too. My parish visiting was *selective*. If you smoked, you saw me. If you didn't, well ...

I'm ashamed! To be as selective as that is nothing short of discriminatory, selfish and *thoroughly* unprofessional. I chose smokers over others in need, just to satisfy my own cravings.

It does, however, leave me with a question. How selective, discriminatory, or self-centred am I in other parts of my life? Perhaps subtly, maybe unconsciously, possibly not often. But are my choices, my selections, always governed by honourable principles, righteousness, fairness, justice? If I could make *biased* choices when I was a smoker, might I still be inclined to make equally *bad* choices when I'm not?

I hope it won't take a congregation to sponsor me for 100 days to work that one through, or to set me on a better path. I'll just have to be more aware of it myself and work on a craving to make healthier choices in my life, attitudes and behaviour than I've done before.

A prayer for today

Jesus said: “You did not choose me, but I chose you ... so that you might go and bear fruit that will last.” (John 15:16) Good choice, Lord! Good choice, I reckon! Amen