

26th November 2022

Stupid

“Very interesting ... but stupid.”

Dan Rowan and Dick Martin, *Roman and Martin's Laugh-in* (catchphrase)

Whatever antithesis Dr Samuel Johnson had towards the 18th century Irish actor and educator, Thomas Sheridan, his biographer, James Boswell, records Johnson saying this:

Why, Sir, Sherry is dull, naturally dull; but it must have taken him a great deal of pains to become what we now see him. Such an excess of stupidity, Sir, is not in nature.

Nobody likes to be called stupid. I certainly don't. And nobody should be measured as stupid just because they can't do things *you* can do or in the fashion you'd like them to be done. You wouldn't like to be called stupid, would you? So why would anyone else?

When I was working in the Youth Camp in Iona many years ago, a group of young people, with different abilities and backgrounds, were with us for a week: ex-offenders; young prisoners on licence; able-bodied teenagers; adults with special needs; people with physical restrictions of one sort or another. Awareness and sensitivity were top of the agenda. Differences were accommodated. But there were still tensions.

Everyone had to take their turn at “chores”, with each person carrying out some chore or another depending on their ability. The chores were shared, so that you weren't assigned to a not-so-enjoyable one all week. One morning, there was an argument over “sweeping out the common-room”. One young lady had been assigned that chore for the day, while another lad refused to give up the brush, even though this wasn't his chore. “Why won't you give the brush over?” I asked. “Because I'm good at brushing,” he said. “I do it in my Day Centre. I'm pretty stupid at everything else.” I was distressed to hear the self-evaluation that he was “pretty stupid at everything else.” Where had he picked that up, I wondered? But I was *delighted* that he'd been affirmed in something.

The argument was resolved. Mister sweeper did the sweeping for the rest of the week. He was a *great* sweeper-upper, it has to be said, and I think I would have been very stupid to think anything else.

A prayer for today

I am a valued child of God. So I value what I am able to do. Sensible, eh?