

1st October 2025

Caution

“The watchful eye of caution.”

James Thomson, *The Works of Mr James Thomson, 1849*

I *still* don't understand all the bells-and-whistles of my new car. As I was driving off yesterday, I had a series of beeps and pings reminding me that, a) I'd still to fasten my seat belt; b) I'd sneaked over 20mph; c) I needed petrol. All three were rectified pretty quickly, but I wonder what the next beep or ping will be trying to tell me, or whether I'll understand it anyway. Perhaps I should make the handbook my bedtime reading.

It's the steering-control stuff that puzzles me most. There's a "thing" which means the car's sensors know when I'm driving too close to the side of the road, or whether I'm changing lanes without signalling. There's a little jerk on the steering wheel to tell me I'm getting it wrong. But ... this electronic sensor stuff isn't perfect. Last week I pulled away from the edge of the road after one of these reminders and went right into a very large pothole! Shouldn't they have pothole detectors on fancy cars? Discuss!

Legend tells us that on either side of the Straits of Messina, between Italy and Sicily, were two dangers: *Charybdis*, a whirlpool which sucked all that tried to cross it into its depths, and *Scylla*, a ghastly monster living on a rock, who snatched up passing mariners in its tentacles and devoured them. The Romans, therefore, had a warning: *Incidis in Scyllam cupiēns vitāre Charybdim* – “You meet with Scylla in your desire to avoid Charybdis”. We know this as, “Out of the frying pan, into the fire.” In my driving, I might hear it as, “Away from the road-edge and into a pothole”. One way or another, beware! In avoiding one danger, be careful not to fall into another. It's about exercising caution all the time, isn't it?

Tucked away in St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians is this little piece of advice (from *The Message* translation):

Don't be so naïve and self-confident. You're not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as anyone else. Forget self-confidence. Cultivate God-confidence.

Be careful *all* the time. We need to make sure we have James Thomson's “watchful eye of caution”. *Charybdis* and *Scylla*, frying-pan and fire, road-edge and pothole. No one wants to see you “fall flat on your face”!

A prayer for today

Loving God, help me exercise caution – over my words and actions, my attitudes and behaviour, my desires and decisions. Thank you. Amen