

Forming Habits



One of our hens, Mate, waits at our kitchen door each afternoon. She has developed a habit of going there for tit-bits. It began a short time ago after her companion, Red, died and Mate wandered to the door mat. I felt sorry for her and offered her some crumbs. The next day she appeared at the same place and at the same time. How could I not fulfil her expectation? And so it went on... A habit formed that in a small way changed the behaviour of our household.

We often focus on and condemn bad habits, but there are good habits which can be formed by us, and in turn, form us and the communities to which we belong.

The Invictus Games was held in Sydney during October. I watched the daily reports on television and was moved by the welcoming and helpful environment which was created by everyone involved. Acts of compassion, understanding and respect for one another were shown by

participants who cared for their mates, even physically holding them at crisis moments. These relationships were more important than any gaining of medals. Repeatedly negative failures or disasters were turned into something positive and healing.

If we consider the Church, our particular congregation, our family, and for me, my Community, we share some of the same difficulties as the defence veterans. We have members who want to belong but who cut themselves off from others or are rejected. All of us are broken people who suffer in one way or the other, like the participants at the Invictus Games. Also, like the men and women at the Games, we can work to cultivate an environment that welcomes and supports other broken people.

As individuals and members of the Body of Christ and other groups, we need to ask, what sort of climate do we construct when chatting with one another, working together or meeting in the supermarket? Do we use these times to build up one another in love and share experiences that might be helpful? Often we do, but at times we may be tempted to complain about someone who is absent.

In order to be people and communities that care about and try to show God's love to others, we can be helped by developing good habits in our relationships. These will reflect the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control". We shall aim to be thankful, respectful, forgiving and asking for forgiveness when we hurt another, open to understanding why people act as they do and ready to sit beside them sharing in their pain.

In the recent Sunday Gospel readings from Mark chapters 8-10, the flow of the narrative is interrupted three times by Jesus speaking of his coming suffering and death in Jerusalem. His disciples rejected or did not understand these seemingly disconnected declarations. In chapter 11 Jesus entered Jerusalem as King on a donkey, and his followers rejoiced. The following Thursday night they fled, fearing for their lives. Jesus stayed, and on the cross, through love, turned negative hate, fear and

suffering into something positive.

This year on November 11 we honour the centenary of the first Armistice Day at the end of World War 1 in 1918. Many people who came back from World Wars 1 and 2 and later wars were not met with the understanding or the care they needed. Instead of rejoicing in the victory, some committed suicide. People at home did not know about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and expected their loved ones to pick up from where they left off when they enlisted.

I believe war is not the way of Jesus. Much can be learnt from past experiences. Understanding why nations want to go to war, and trying to face and work through the issues involved, is surely a better way than using guns and bombs that kill and injure people.

I read in *The Melbourne Anglican* (October 2018) a reflection by Wilfred Owen, an English poet and soldier who was in France during WW1. He noticed that on one of the many wayside crucifixes, the figure of Jesus had lost a limb due to artillery shelling, and wrote:

*“One ever hangs where shelled roads part.
In this war He too lost a limb,
But His disciples hide apart;
And now the Soldiers bear with Him.”*

Did this Calvary speak to soldiers of the presence of Jesus with them in their injuries and dying? When we as individuals and groups face pain, loss and depression, these negatives, through the giving and receiving of love, can be turned into something positive where we find Jesus present. The behaviour of an old hen and broken war veterans are examples for us that alone and together we can form habits that work for the well-being of one another and our communities. Such habits can gradually develop into natural impulses that support and encourage others, and propel us into familiar and unfamiliar places. There, as members of the Body of Christ we shall reveal in our beings something of God's compassionate love and care for all.

Sister Helen CSC (November 1918)