

I have taken up Sudoku...

The morning paper I read has a sudoku puzzle at the end of the news section and I have discovered that sudoku is an interesting way of spending those few moments before the work of the day begins. I have noticed that although there are several ways of beginning a puzzle, eventually the way ahead narrows down to finding one particularly number – and this is the key to solving the rest of the puzzle. Work out that number and the others then begin to tumble into place, but fail to find that number and you cannot proceed. My trouble is that I am not very good at going back on myself to discover where my thinking might be faulty and so I get stuck. I, then, either throw the puzzle to one side and tell myself that it is just beyond me - or even suggest that the puzzle compiler does not know his job properly and has made a mistake somewhere!

This realisation that the process of solving a sudoku puzzle always funnels down to finding one vital number, which I must get right in order to proceed further, has led me to look at the way my relationships work – and it seems to me that there is a parallel here.

My relationships with people usually start very well: things fit together nicely and we proceed into friendship, swimmingly – but then something happens, something goes wrong, some real or perceived injustice, which threatens the relationship. This *impasse* is, of course, always the other person's fault and when I think over the state of play, with regard to him or her, I usually content myself with listing my perceived grievances – and do not easily go back over my thinking to see whether it is all as one-sided as I tend to think. It is very much like the position I am in when I am faced with finding that vital sudoku number, which will enable me to proceed with the puzzle. Somewhere in my thinking there is a fault, which prevents me from seeing the way ahead - and I need to discover that and put it right, if the friendship is to proceed.

This analogy between sudoku and human relationships, however, only goes so far, because in the puzzle of life there is an extra element needed. When my eyes finally discover something I have overlooked in my sudoku puzzle, I immediately jump on it with glee and move past the bottleneck. However, in the puzzle of life and friendship, I may see where I have made a mistake – but my pride often tries to stop me using it. I do not just need knowledge - I also need a change of heart.

Some time ago, I decided to help a lad with his further studies. He had been very helpful to me and so I told him that if he needed anything he should ask. Things went very well first of all, but then he asked if he could have some money in advance because his father was sick. I agreed. Later that month, however, he asked for money for expenses. A week later, he asked for help with his rent; a few days after that he asked for money for petrol and then he asked for money for credit for his mobile. At this point, I began to get indignant and went over and over in my mind how many times he had asked for extra money that month and I decided that I needed to have a serious talk with him. The next time I saw him, I listed out the number of times he had asked for money and the lad answered, "But, Father, you told me to ask when I needed money and because my father was sick I needed extra help - but when I asked for the money to cover everything you said 'no' and when I asked for my rent you also said 'no'. It was only when I asked you for money for petrol and my phone that you said 'yes.'" I, then, realised that the lad was right and I had become so tunnel-visioned about his constant asking that I had forgotten that, first he was short of money because his father was sick and second that I had not given anything on the first two occasions he had asked. And it is here, in situations like this, that the puzzles of sudoku and friendship part company. Pride does not appear in a sudoku puzzle, but pride appeared in my heart when the lad's answer made me realise how wrong I had been in my thinking - I found myself tempted to say, "But nevertheless you kept asking!"

This same *impasse* sometimes also appears in our relationship with God. Our friendship with God usually begins wonderfully well – we turn to the Lord in our need and we experience his tender care. But, then, some situation arises – not necessarily something big – and we pray about it, but it is not given and we find ourselves back in that position, where we need the vital number, without which, we cannot move on in our friendship. However, it often does not even occur to us that there is a vital number to find and we find ourselves tempted to throw the relationship in the corner, saying either, "there probably isn't a God anyway" – or "if God is good, how can he let this happen". If my friendship with God is to get over

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this blockage, I have to find that vital number and I personally know only one way to do so – it is by getting down on my knees and saying humbly to the Lord, "then, do it your way." But here too, pride can so easily get in the way and I find myself muttering, "No! I want it done my way."

In both these cases, my relationship with my friends and my relationship with God need not only the knowledge of how to proceed along the path of friendship, but also the power to walk that path – but that power does not reside in me!

The dramatic ceremonies of Holy Week and Easter point to the source of that power, but our access to that power can also suffer from the sudoku syndrome. In our participation in the ceremonies, we are remembering something that happened 2000 years ago, but if we stay at the level of "remembering" then the way to accessing that power is blocked. I need to go back on my thinking – to look at the candle I hold on Easter night - for it proclaims that the power of Resurrection is not just something that happened 2000 years ago, but is, first and foremost, something that is happening now – if only I will let it touch my heart and life. The power of Resurrection is the power to be changed - and my friendships with others and my friendships with God can only progress when I realise – and accept – that I must be changed, if I am to meet the needs of the present situation in which those friendships are lived out. It is Christ's resurrection that can bring that about, but I need to entrust myself into his loving care – for it is not the power of magic, it is the power of Love.

One of the parts of the Mass that we do not sufficiently appreciate is the offertory. Sandwiched, as it is, between the readings and homily on the one side and the Eucharistic prayer on the other, it can appear to be merely an interlude between the two, when I rummage in my purse or pocket to get some small change for the collection. But, in fact, it is vital for the whole Mass – without the offertory, there is no Mass. Having listened to the readings and homily, the offertory is the moment when I am invited to give myself – and not just my money – to be taken up in the Eucharist and changed. In the Readings God speaks to us and in the Eucharistic prayer he comes among us – but he speaks without an answer unless I respond at the offertory – and there is nowhere for God to come down to unless I have already given myself in the bread and wine. It is at the offertory that I can discover that vital number which enables the rest of my puzzle to be worked out. When I give myself, I give myself to be changed, re-worked and thus enabled not only to see the road ahead, but also to walk it with the Lord. Without that giving of myself, there can be no Eucharist in any real sense. I might see the host raised and I might believe that God has come among us again in the Eucharist, but I watch as a mere spectator not a participant. When I give myself back into the hands of the God, who created me, to be moulded anew, he frees me from the sudoku *impasse*, in which I find myself, and accompanies me onwards into the rest of the puzzle of love. But, for all this to happen, I have to get down on my knees and say, "then, do it your way". This is the offertory.

I do not complete a sudoku puzzle every day. I sometimes sit and stare at one for days, until something gently moves my eyes to see something that I had overlooked, something I was blind to. I, then, pounce on that number and in so doing the rest of the puzzle opens up before me. Ah, how I wish that I would pounce on the solutions of life as eagerly, when the Spirit gently moves me to see the way ahead. However, my sudoku experiences teach me patience, not only in waiting to see the way ahead in my puzzles – but also in waiting for the power of resurrection to change me so that I can move. It is quite wonderful what one can learn from sudoku!

Diary

The Parish Priest at Kuta, here in Bali, Father Hadis, said that we should have the Holy Week ceremonies in English as well as in Indonesian. I was a little reluctant to divide the community in this way, but we did so and held the English services in the Parish Centre while the Indonesian services were in the main Church. We had between 50 and 70 in the Parish centre and there were between 3 and 4000 in the Church – and in front of the Church – and under the Church – viewing the services via video link!

At the end of the Triduum, Father Hadis said, "The English community has been born" and he is right, it has. We have had an English Mass on Sunday evenings, but that small gathering for Holy Week meant we had to work together closely, creating everything from scratch and it has formed the kernel of a

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community, which we now have to let grow. I am hoping that as it finds its own identity, it will become more and more a part of the Parish as a whole. So..... interesting times are ahead!

I have started looking for a house to live in after my sabbatical is over. I would like to find an old house which needs renovating so that I can adapt it to my needs. I also need a garden to pray in. Most of what I have seen up to now either does not suit my needs or suit the available resources. So, please join me in a prayer to St Joseph – the patron of my society and always my house-hunter.

God bless,

Terry