

I didn't do it!

“He started the fight.” “I didn't do it” “She pulled my hair first.” “He called me names.” “I didn't start it.” “It's not my fault.” “He bit me first.” “Someone shouldn't have left it there in the first place.” “Someone else must have done it.” “If you had secured the garbage when you put it out, the dogs in the neighbourhood wouldn't have gotten at it.” “If you paid attention to what you were cooking on the stove, the dinner wouldn't have gotten burned.”

We all know the various scenarios that children and adults use to blame someone else for something they, themselves, did. The blame game is alive and well and filled with potholes of excuses.

The blame game is as old as creation itself. We see it in operation as far back as the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve. When God asked Adam about eating the forbidden fruit, his first reaction was to blame the woman. He also blames God because God had given him the woman. Of course, the woman had her excuse – the devil tricked her into eating the forbidden fruit. Eve ate from the tree but the tree was planted by someone else. The revolving door of blame continues.

I often wonder if this is our original sin, namely our capacity to blame, to avoid responsibility. It seems we would rather blame someone else for starting the fire so they get burned and we, on a deeper level, get burned with shame.

The English comedian and TV host, Spike Milligan, captured this mentality succinctly in his poem, “Small Dreams of a Scorpion,” where he says:

“When I die and He says my sins are myriad
I will ask why he made me so imperfect
And he will say, ‘My chisels were blunt’
Then I will say, ‘then, why did you make so many
Of me.”

Like Spike Milligan, we like to blame God for everything thus exonerating ourselves. We sincerely hope that God is an expert at coping with our blame.

Blame is a great defence mechanism. Some might call it projection, denial, or displacement. Yet, blame helps us preserve our sense of self-esteem by avoiding awareness of our own flaws or failings.

Of course, we cannot escape the concept of sin. We may wish to soften its blow and call it by other names – psychological, infractions, legal, misunderstanding, cultural and family impact, blame – but the reality continues that we all have the capacity to love and the capacity to hate.

Someone once said that sin has two rebellious daughters: language and hope. Language to confirm the awful truth about us and hope which gives us the ability to move forward and change.

Obviously, the Incarnation, the coming of Jesus into our fractured world, is a reminder that we all live in a world that is corrupt and yet hopeful. People are blamed for doing good as well as for doing nothing. Yet, some keep striving for good in spite of blame from others because their quality of hope is stronger than their ability to blame. And the interesting thing about hope is that it is only dashed in retrospect. Hope is a song worth singing even when you cannot sing. Hope is a reminder that even if something doesn't come true, it is worth believing that it might come true.

Hope is like a reservoir of emotional strength. If one is being cut down, hope gives one the strength to return good for evil. If one faces a setback in life, one draws on the strength of the reservoir of hope to keep going and not give up. If one faces the temptation to steal, to blame, to lie, to be dishonest; hope allows one to take the high road, thus denying oneself fleeting pleasure.

The late English theologian, Sabastian Moore, said something about hope that continues to percolate in my mind for many years. He said, “Hope is desire in the skilled hands of God,” Maybe, if we hope more and blame less, the good Lord will catch us up in his skilled hands and transport us back to Paradise once more.