

## The big “Why?”

My November column told the story of my visitors from the States; how, when encountering the beauty and naturalness of our countryside, they remarked: “How can anyone not believe in God” on seeing nature at its finest.

Following that column, I received an email from Ervin in Biloxi. He wrote: The other side of the coin is that people look at the terrible suffering that millions of innocent creatures, small children, all animals must endure apparently without purpose, every minute of every day. Not to speak of the tortures that whole populations, Jews, Arabs presently and only decades ago endured. How does one square this with an ever loving God? You will say that it is another mystery, as the Trinity, what soul is, what God is, etc., etc. How did sin emerge as a concept, when formalized religions of civilizations are only a few thousand years, not millions as mankind, old are. I am sure that you gave it some thought and reconciled it with a Loving God....I enjoy this reading your column. God bless you also with good health and optimism. Yours truly,”

Ervin posed the other side of the coin: When you see all the evil in the world, how do you reconcile that will a loving God? Great minds have wrestled with that contradiction since the beginning of time and still haven't come up with a satisfying answer. Even poor Job in the Old Testament wrestled with it when life was falling apart all around him – his livelihood and family dying.

Paul had his own inner demons to deal with when he said “In my inmost self I dearly love God's law, but I see that acting on my body there is a different law which battles against the law in my mind. So, I am brought to be a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body.

Scripture scholars and theologians wrestled with the contradiction as well, but the contradiction still remains.

Even Thomas Aquinas, who wrote volumes of Summa, still had to admit at the end of his life, that he was still as ignorant as ever of understanding the mystery of God. He concluded finally that “good can exist without evil, whereas evil cannot exist without good...”

Sometimes, it seems logical for us to compare. We compare light and darkness, sea and sky, night and day, mercy and judgment. By comparing, it gives us a perspective, a point of reference. Often, we are inclined to compare good and evil as another frame of reference to try and understand their concepts in a context but St. Thomas reminds us that goodness can exist without the presence of evil; that God is goodness personified.

C.S. Lewis, in his book, “The Problem with Pain,” wrestled with the contradiction of good and evil, when he wrote, “The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves, is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word "love", and look on things as if man were the centre of them. Man is not the centre. God does not exist for the sake of man. Man does not exist for his own sake. "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." We were made not primarily that we may love God (though we were made for that too) but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which the divine love may rest "well pleased".”

We all remember the old saying that says “There is some bad in the best of us and some good in the worst of us.” We are a contradiction. We are capable of great things and, at the same time, capable of great destruction and evil. Our same human coin is stamped with the two contradictory sides.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn having experienced evil in Russia, in his book, “The Gulag Archipelago” said that “if only it were so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?!”

Sometimes, I hear parents ask the question when a child's coin is flipped to the evil side; when the child goes down a path that the parents hoped would never happen to their child. The parents ask: “Where did we go wrong? We tried to do right for them; to lead them down the right path. Where did we fail?”

Growing up, if misfortune, pain, suffering or crosses visited a neighbour, other neighbours, reflecting on their own good fortune, would bless the good Lord for protecting themselves from their neighbour's misfortune by saying “there go I but for the grace of God.” In other words, the mantle of God's protection wrapped around them and protected them from any such calamity.

Maybe, when the Lord showers us with blessings and gifts beyond compare, we would also say, “There go I because of the grace of God.”

I suppose when it is our time to meet the good Lord, the dichotomies and incongruities of this life as well as the many complexities of life’s mysteries; will pale in comparison to the Goodness gifted to us.