

Do you have dreams? If you do I think you are blessed provided they are of the Spirit. Well I had a dream about a rice merchant last night and it went something like this: “A merchant had his little shop in the main street of Hilongos and sold many varieties of rice to its inhabitants. Their choice was cheap Government stock or several types of expensive high quality imported rice. Though the store keeper was doing quite well he thought far too many people were choosing the poorer quality over the far more nutritious high quality rice so he decided to take the Government rice off the shelves and store it in one of his big barns. He continued getting his Government assignments but did not put it out for sale which caused a real shortage. Anyway, he thought I will just sell the quality imported rices because he knew what was best for his people. Well not surprisingly his business took a nose dive. His answer to this was to bring the price of the nutritious rices down a bit by adding a mix of the government rice he had hoarded. Surely everyone would be happy as his price would now be affordable. Well not so. So he cleared his shelves and brought back the cheap government stock. Unfortunately people were still unhappy with him. His son was then sent out to find out what the problem was. The reply that came back surprised him and made him rethink the way he ran his little store. “All they want Papa is a choice, don’t matter how good it is or how cheap it is. All they want is the freedom to choose”

Now this is what got me, as people here don’t like been manipulated and certainly don’t like been patronised. Who does? I hear you say. I happened to say to a newly made friend that I thought Cock fighting was cruel and should be legislated against for the good of the people not to mention the poor old bird. To another I made some comment about this corruption problem and the need for a change in the way the Government does its business, for the betterment of the people of course. (You know me never short of a word) Well I guess you know the answer to that. . Who am I to say what is good for them. They really would like the freedom to make up their own minds on how they live their lives and how to solve their own problems; of course I quickly agreed. Free will is so often taken for granted but it is God’s most protected gift to us. Not even He wants to tamper with it even though it can get us into all sorts of bother. All the National heroes here fought to free the people from oppression and were all killed doing so. In his day Rizal was executed for daring to question the way the Religious Orders controlled all forms of Filipino society and also for writing about the Spanish Authorities suppression of his people’s freedom. He spoke out and it cost him his life and 2000 years ago another Man lost his life for the same reason. Nothing much changes.

Our Doctor friend and our dear benefactor whom we call the Mother Teresa of Hilongos, tells me that belief in God is very important to the people of The Philippines. She said

people are quick to attribute any personal misfortune to the will of God and she related how despite her best efforts people some times die especially when she is delivering babies and she found Parents most understanding and saying to her “You did your best, Its Gods well” Now one may ask how can it be God’s will that any one should die prematurely? The whole idea that God’s will might involve pain and suffering and yes even death is difficult for one to grasp or accept. Not so here in the Philippines apparently.

God’s will is to do with leaving us free to make choices rather than about pain, suffering and death which I believe are consequences of our choices when all is said and done. I don’t think God wills consequences, though may be it could be said He allows them for our own good. Because He respects our free will, He certainly won’t manipulate or protect us from the consequences of bad choices. His will is; that the forces for good must exist side by side with the forces for evil. (The weeds should be let grow with the wheat-Matthew) If we could only choose well and never be allowed to choose badly, then where is the merit in doing what is right? We would be like our store keeper’s clients in my dream, unable to have the freedom to choose. I think we would be just as unhappy.

Redemption was won for us because Jesus understood this better than any of us. **“Father let this chalice pass me by”** Was Jesus asking his Father to soften the hearts of his persecutors so He would not have to suffer and die? (A kind of little miracle if you please so I can avoid what looks to be inevitable.) I doubt it very much. **“Not my will but thine be done”** rather He was saying Father I respect what You have put in place and I respect peoples choices too. If Pilate decides the wrong way I don’t expect, Father, that you force him to change his mind, I will go through with the consequences knowing that it is your will that they be left free to make those life and death choices. His faith in His Father stood solid right through his life and certainly during his sufferings and death then right through to His Glorious Resurrection. He knew that the Father would see to it that good prevails.

This might help us understand why the people here are far more accepting and joyful than people elsewhere who are only too ready to blame God for every bad thing and conveniently forget to attribute to God any good thing that happens. Filipinos do seem to really understand and more importantly accept that the will of God can be lived and that any evil in the world is the result of someone’s free choice or the consequence of someone’s bad Choice.

The gift of free will is to be rejoiced over and used for the honour and glory of God. We are created in the image of God Himself. We have the power to choose good or evil and that’s the bottom line. We can however pray that we be given the grace to choose wisely.

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