

About two weeks ago, as you may have heard on the news or read in the newspaper, police in Rome were called because neighbours of an elderly couple heard them crying loudly. Police arrived to the sobbing pair to learn that they had no friends and were so sad about all the world news that they just cried. The kind policemen rooted through the couple's pantry and made a pasta dinner for four and they all sat down to a meal together. That was their wise solution: kindness, friendship and a shared meal.

At times we all feel like that couple in Rome. At times the world seems such a mess, and nothing is getting better! Hate, murder, atrocities abound. The world reacts to this in various ways, from supporting Donald Trump or similar characters, to taking in refugee families. That such a wide variance in response is so obvious is also a cause for sadness to some of us.

In addition, as we age we get a growing sense of frustration with ourselves, our world and one another. Along with this our friends start dying and we begin to feel more and more isolated. I remember my grandmother saying, "Getting old is no fun. We just sit at bridge get together and talk about how the last one died." I said, "you could make new friends, Gaga." Her response was, "I'm too old!"

Are you crying yet?

There is no doubt that all that I've just said is true, but if we concentrate on these matters solely, we are closing off our vision to see that life can be delightful, despite our difficulties or the world's problems.

So here are my recommendations to maintain sanity:

1. Know who you are and what you stand for. There are times when we hear publicity of outspoken characters who manage to wrangle publicity when we think we are like Alice in Wonderland, that whatever we had always held to be true no one else does. This is the time to take stock: What do I believe on issues in today's press? Why do I believe this? What can I do to stand for what is right? Have I researched the facts enough on this issue to be convinced that my conclusions are correct? Sometimes the best action is no action - let the idiots hang themselves, as they often do eventually. If questioned we must know what we believe and not be afraid to speak out with clear explanations where it is safe to do so.

We can write letters - endless pages of them. They do add up eventually. We can support organisations that stand for what we do- put our money where our mouth is, so to speak. For example, I have decided to regularly contribute to charities whose goals I approve highly of: Fred Hallows, Doctors without Borders, UNHCR, Amnesty International, North Rocks school for deaf and blind children and two girls through PLAN. Then when people call up soliciting funds I have my speech ready: "I think you have a good cause, but I am a self funded retiree who gets no tax relief from donations, and has a limited income. Therefore I have chosen to give to six charities regularly and draw the line there. Please take me off your call list." Usually the response is good. It also makes me feel better!

The best thing to do is to participate in just one organisation that is the right fit for us and work through them for what we feel is the right way to make change in our society. It may not solve all problems, but it is a genuine attempt to do something.

2. Take time to enjoy the moment. We can get so caught up in what "should be done" or "could be done" and our frustrations with the actions of our politicians, that we lose sight of everyday moments what can honestly delight and refresh us. You may recall a few years ago I gave you a sermon about Irma Shimfissle, a simple farmer's wife who just knew how to enjoy and appreciate all the little things in life, and got a kick out of that. When she died she met up with her idea of God, and was told that the purpose of life was to just enjoy what you could out of life. Then she was miraculously revived on the mortuary slab giving everyone quite a jolt. Well, in a way if we don't find those special moments to savour we are turning our backs on the purpose of life. All by ourselves we cannot make the world a better place, but when we keep the idea of joy in life active, we keep alive the spirit of a meaningful life we hope for for all people.

There are so many things we forget about, and take for granted and we don't appreciate them enough. The fact that we can turn on a tap and get clean water is a credit to modern infrastructure. The funny antics that animals get up to helps us see we humans are not the centre of the universe. It gives us perspective. For example I was walking Waldo in a small reserve near our home the last few days when a winged creature - a Plover - kept swooping down at me, quite near my head. It was connecting with me quite deliberately,

in an effort to protect its young. For that bird, it was the most important thing in life.

I could go on about enjoying the moment. Savouring good food, feeling the sun on ones back in the winter, a pretty sunrise or sunset, watching children play, closing ones eyes and knowing ones garden in a different way. Just stopping and considering ourselves as a speck in an already magnificent universe gives us perspective beyond the news on TV.

3. Be Creative Human society would not have developed so incredibly as it has if we were devoid of creativity! I believe there is something creative in all of us. To participate in something creative gives us a sense of fulfilment, just in the act of creating. We don't all have to be Rembrandts or Dickens or world famous chefs, but there is still something we can all do. For example I have recently taken up a craft hobby that I've always wanted to do, and am totally enjoying the long process. It is teaching me patience among other things. But when I finished my first piece, a coloured glass box that I put tea light candles in, I am proud of my achievement - even if I did get a "D" in soldering. I look forward to making a better job on the next project! From gardening to writing to reading for kids at the library to painting or whatever, participating in the creative process stimulates and excites us and reminds us of our worth.

4. Make an effort to forge links with other people. As we age we sometimes lose the motivation to make friends like we did when we were young. We take our given friends for granted, perhaps till we see them at the next funeral. Well sometimes we need to stop resting on our laurels and make the effort to really visit with others, to form links. We also need to make friends with younger people - to listen to them and their stories. It's our connection with the future, and our pleasure for now.

I don't have many real friends in Thirroul, though there are a lot of friendly acquaintances. I find that if I just make an effort to remember their names, things look up. In a complex of 38 units this is a challenge at times! However, when I walk down the main street of Thirroul and greet shopkeepers by name, and ask about their children or grandchildren or whatever, it makes a connection. Sometimes we have to make more of an effort to ask old friends over to socialise - either for lunch or coffee or drinks. The effort is worth it. Connecting with other humans of like values and attitudes reinforces us as people, and brings us a

sense of security through community. I think the biggest problem in modern life is the lack of community sense, of people helping each other out or just being polite to one another. It's so simple but making the effort to connect with others does lighten our load.

5. Vote! speak up! Write letters to the editor when we feel strongly about things. Don't give up! In the SWC we sing a song Behind the Barricades about people fought and died for freedoms we take for granted. If we fail to use our freedoms we run every chance of losing them eventually. "When the beating of the drum echoes the beating of your heart, you know that a new life begins when tomorrow comes!" We need to keep beating those drums!

6. Remember to count our blessings, and those of our nation It is so easy to get all wrapped up in what is going wrong in our parliaments, banks, schools and businesses that we need to step back and take stock in what DOES work. Clean water, smoothly run elections, increased community awareness of pollution and global warming, and the general desire to do something about it, relative peace on our streets. Yes there is more that can be done - always was, always will be - but to appreciate our blessings puts things into perspective!

7. And finally, when it all gets too much, tune out! There is something to be said for a week's news block out! Take the time to notice other things in your life. You'll find that at the end of the week the news will still be dire but the world managed to keep turning with or without your knowledge of the war in Syria or worrying about refugees! You will gain a new perspective.

So that's my advice:

- Know yourself and what you stand for
- Take time to enjoy the moment - smell the roses!
- Do something creative regularly
- Make more effort to forge links with other people.
- Practice your freedoms whenever you can
- Count our blessings
- If necessary have a news black out.

Little by little is all we or anyone can hope for to make a better world.

Blessed Be