

RM 7 - The Heart Model – or simply Heart 17.2.23

My 83 years on this planet have taught me that we do not know ourselves very well.

One of the key – the core – commandments Jesus came to give is, “Love one another as I have loved you”(Jn 13,34) But who is the other? Who am I?

Real, genuine love is mega Ubuntu. Good for the lover and the beloved.

Living by giving, resonates with the inner life of the Blessed Trinity. The mutual , reciprocal gifts of sonship and fatherhood, generates the divine "we", the Holy Spirit.

It's great to be like a full, winter moon, reflecting the sun - God's presence - into the emotionally cold world.

Love , genuine love, needs to be across the PIES. Remember this word is my acronym for the Physical, Intellectual, Emotional and Spiritual components of our life. To give feelings greater status and help you realise your emotional vulnerability, rather than the traditional Mind, Body and Spirit, I go with the quartet of the Physical, Intellectual, Emotional and Spiritual, which makes the nice ‘PIES of my life’ or simply PIES.

The interactions between your PIES – each in constant flux - shape your perceptions and priorities, your energies and abilities. Each of the quartet focuses on its own specific areas of our lives. Never forget that we mould ourselves by what we take on board across our PIES.

The respect and appreciation on the Spiritual, makes you feel good on the Emotional, but calls for you to think on the intellectual to decide what it means on the physical.
What do I need to do to make the life of the one I love better, richer, more delightful?

Does it need to be tough love? Encouraging? Supporting? Listening? Does your life add value to those you love?

Is your friend intelligent or just knowledgeable? The Brain of Britain knows a great deal but need not be above average intelligent. What is there in his or her land of the heart?

Might there be the onset of dementia?

What is his or her motivation, ambitions? What are yours? Anger plus faith can generate hope.

As a boarder in a prep school aged nine, I came across some Edwardian atlases. I wasted a fair amount of prep time seeing how the interior of Africa came into sharper focus thanks to people like Sir Richard Burton, David Livingstone, John Hanning Speke and Henry Morton Stanley. I now see that these maps helped me shape my Heart metaphor for the way I saw people – including myself.

This 'spaceless Land of the Heart' model or 'Heart' metaphor, resurfaced in 1991 as I was setting up SPEC, a residential peer-educational centre for young people based in All Saints, London Colney, Hertfordshire.

I wanted a visual reminder to anyone who came in through its doors that they should never judge anyone by their appearance or accent. I searched and eventually found a map of the world surrounded by most national flags. I framed it. Pointing to the countries one by one, I would say: "Look at the flag of China. It is the same size as Switzerland ... as Australia as ...Chad."

Faces of people – even their bodies - are like flags. You never know what is behind, beneath their skin, teeth, hair, and eyes. You never know what is inside a box until you open it. Never judge a book by its cover. Never judge a person's character and abilities by their body and face. The eyes, perhaps.

Ask yourself, 'What is there within the Heart of the person in my head? How do I see that personality, that character?'

If, perhaps on a retreat, or three, you allow yourself time to travel through your own Heart, you will encounter your real Self. Then, as you travel on through your life, that experience will help you understand others as you encounter them.

The size and shape of a body may tell us something about physical prowess, but give us no clues as to a person's character. Little men like Caesar and Napoleon had, for better and for worse, massive inner energies and strengths. They were 'Great'. If you are ever tempted to admire Julius Caesar, bear in mind that his Gallic Wars caused more than one million deaths. Almost that many were then sold into slavery after the conquest. Historians have compared Caesar to *Yersinia Pestis* - Black Death - in Gaul. Not great.

While military deaths in the Napoleonic Wars are put at between 2.5 million and 3.5 million, civilian death tolls vary from 750,000 to 3 million. Thus, estimates of total dead, both military and civilian, range from 3,250,000 to 6,500,000. Not great.

Thomas Aquinas was a whale of a man but his mind was as sharp as a scalpel and swift as an ostrich. I use the word ostrich because though ostriches would not beat cheetahs over 100 metres but, unlike the explosive cats, which tire after about a minute, an ostrich can sustain a speed of about 50km/h for as long as 30 minutes.

All of us - especially when young – are like Africa was for Europeans in the 18th century: known around the edges; inside, a total mystery to the outsider.

Through their exports, their words and above all their deeds, I begin to get to know what is within another's Heart. Give people time. Let them speak. Then you may gradually learn what is within their Heart. The silent may be silent and strong. They may be simply silent because they are simply empty. The topics they choose speak volumes. Notice their body language, their face and the sounds they make.

How vastly different are the mind-sets: the values, ambitions, concerns and dreams of people with whom we rub along. Though some look more or less like me, they seem to see the world as though from another planet.

It takes time and patience to discover what there really is inside anyone. The content of a Heart is constantly changing. With time and its deeper wells of experience, the hinterland is enriched. Alive, it is never static. Suffering and much else constantly transforms it. This makes my own life and the lives of others intriguing.

In my priestly minister I have come across an unknown heart linking up with another unexplored heart.

Just one example that sticks clearly in my memory.

Many years ago, I was due to officiate at the marriage of a Caroline and her fiancé. Interviewing him prior to instigating their pre-marriage instruction, I discovered that he knew she was university but did not know what she was studying. I managed to fracture that relationship - which had been generated by her beauty and his wealth - and no harm was done. The marriage did not take place.

People are great entertainment. For me, Hearts are the most fascinating reality on earth. At its best, humanity is magnificent, sublime. At its worst, depressingly grotesque. Man's - and woman's - inhumanity to man and woman is jaw-droopingly shocking.

The Heart, being spiritual, is spaceless yet not timeless. It is alive only in the present moment though, like any country, it carries within its history, its past.

What matters is what comes out of my Heart. "By my exports you will know me." I leave it to others to judge whether the product presents an acceptable face of a priest. Listening to what a person says, focusing on their words, silences, actions and body language enables you to monitor their exports and thus the quality of their Heart – there and then.

This model has helped me understand the fragility and beauty of human lives. The flora and fauna, the savage tribes and the rebel-held areas of a country, seem to reflect the irrational instincts, the emotions and passions influencing, at time controlling, human lives.

In even the most scenic countries, you will, if you look carefully enough, discover areas of poverty, of slums, maybe shantytowns and quarries disfiguring an otherwise beautiful view.

To protect themselves, Hearts hide heaps of things. Hearts are complex, to say the least!

In case it might help you, as it has assisted me to empathise with the alterity [posh word for 'the otherness'] of others, I share with you my Model.

To stimulate you to play with this model of The |Land of the Heart, here is my directory.

Heartland	The Heart	PIES
Civil Service	the brain	S
Climate	temperament	E & S
Culture	social behaviour	P & I
Election Manifestos	values, intentions	S
Established Church	Religion	P, I, E & S
Exports	vices & virtues	S
Foreign Office	empathy	I, E & S
Foreign Aid	compassion	E
Foreign Policy	generosity	P & S
Geology	character	I, E & S
Seismic stability	strength of character	S
Mineral wealth	energy	P
Prime Minister	the ego, the Self	S
Leader of the Opposition	The Id	S
Storms & tsunamis	passions	E
The Judiciary	conscience	S
The Legislative	internalised ethics	S

You might tweak that model, or indeed dismantle it completely, and draw up your own.

While I import many ideas, including the teaching of the RC Church, I try to live as a sovereign state. My judiciary, my conscience, which had to be educated like any competent judge, is independent. I am responsible for my actions.

In some countries, the civil service is chaotic – as it is in hearts with mental illnesses. While paralysed limbs reduce freedom of movement, mental illnesses reduce freedom of responsibility.

Governments change. Sinners become saints. Fascist parties can seize power.

Change for better - conversion of the Heart. New Government.

Remember how Saul became Paul and then St Paul?

St Augustine of Hippo had been a naughty man in his younger years but after his conversion to Christianity and baptism in 386, a great theologian, bishop and eventually a saint.

Then there is St. Vladimir, the patron saint of Russian Catholics, and the grandson of St. Olga. When civil war broke out between his half-brothers, Vladimir was forced to flee to Scandinavia; but he did not stay long. He put together an army and returned to Kiev to capture and murder his own half-brother to regain power.

Vladimir became the ruler of Novgorod. Thanks to his wife, he became a Christian and as a Christian ruler he helped convert The Rus to Christianity. By the time he died in 1015, he had become a saint.

In this model, the Opposition is NOT as in the UK, loyal. It is like the fascist party in a liberal State. When I kneel down before lifting my body to start my 85 press-ups before my morning shower, I often hear the lower Vlad – the opposition – whispering “You are tired. Why not leave it until tomorrow?” The higher Vlad, using a word not likely to come from the mouth of a priest, gets on with the task in hand. Using my pride to fight my sloth, those press-ups get done.

What are your, what are ‘the other’s’ Identity, Values and Roles?

To what does the Other Belong? What does the other believe? How does the other behave?

Who gives him or her their deepest identity? Where does the other really come from?

Maybe, because I was born in Prague and have lived over seventy years in England, and though I support England in sport, I feel, I know, deep down, I am a child of God. It is God who gives me my core identity. How about you?

Many people like to die where they were born. That place has given them their identity.

As I know God is - like gravity - everywhere, I will be happy to die anywhere. And, though I hope my dying will not be too painful and I look forward to being dead and alive with God in eternity.

Whence come your values? We see as we are, we are as we have become.

I know why I am on earth. I know my vocation. How about you?

The strategy may be clear but as we cannot predict the future, you might need to alter your tactics.

Whenever I have been asked by an enthusiastic Christian, "Brother, are you saved." I reply, I do not know. As yet, I am not dead."

Heart, like countries, evolve. Some very slowly, some precociously fast.

It takes time to metamorphose – even sublimate – aggression into appreciation and fear into respect. While we are on earth, we need to keep working at it. We are not there yet.

I distinguish between motivations (***) and intentions. My intentions are like a steering wheel. My motivations, the energies that propel the vehicle of my life, include the seven deadly sins (****).

We are far more than merely rational creatures. Within our Hearts, beneath our PIES, there are subconscious swathes of reality that we ignore at our peril. Never be surprised by a sudden volcano, or tsunami, of unfamiliar feelings when faced with an unexpected experience.

A while back, I developed a very stiff right shoulder. Some of the tendons felt very tender. I could not move my right arm without severe pain. I took some analgesics but with only very temporary benefits.

(*) Intentions are my vehicle's steering wheel, enabling me to FASH: **F**ulfil my potential, **A**void boredom, **S**erve others and nature and **H**elp God.

(**) The instincts of fear and aggression, of flight or fight

(***) These are my vehicle's four driving wheels: fear of rejection, fear of boredom leading to depression, desire to make a difference and hope to leave a legacy.

(****) Envy, gluttony, greed or avarice, lust, pride, sloth, and wrath or anger. We are what we ingest. Everything we import across our PIES affects our Heart.

After a bad night's sleep, caused by the pain, my arm felt like a ragged doll's: limp and useless. As I walked along a corridor, I almost passed out with nausea-pain. Therefore, I engaged my brain. I turned to God. I prayed, pondering the symptoms. "Why was I like this?" Yes, my right arm felt colder than my left.

Suddenly: Bingo. I know. It is obvious! Somewhere deep within my Heart I suddenly know I have been cold-shouldered. That is what I had been suppressing.

Without any malice, due to the tides and times of fortune, a number of people had lost almost all contact with me. The telephone was silent. Texts felt as infrequent as raindrops in the Gobi desert.

The moment I articulated this, the pain ceased as though someone had thrown a switch.

The tendons were tender for a couple more days but I could move my arm and put on my shirt and jacket without contortion. Within a week, I was back doing press-ups with no noxious side effects.

For example, if I sense and admit I am angry and about to explode, I now laugh at my stupidity – have a laugh with God - and defuse the bomb before it explodes in rage and causes harm. Laughter – even when forced - alters dopamine and serotonin activity. Laughter is a healthy way to overcome stress.

The Emperor Augustus, he of the *Pax Romana*, controlled his temper by silently reciting the alphabet: "Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta..." By the time he reached Omega, his Heart was calm. Apparently, he never once gave an order in anger.

(Ref E.H. Gombrich's 'Little History of the World', p.90)

Feelings, emotions and passions in my Heart, are like the weather; morally neutral. However, it is up to me how I react; what I export to the world outside. I know I am responsible for what I say and do.

Some people seem incapable of controlling their emotions and lash out when hurt. Those who love them cannot help being hurt and feel pain within their own Heart.

Knowing and loving myself better as time goes by, makes it easier for me to exculpate others. As two wise clichés put it: “To love is to understand.” “To understand is to forgive”.

With time, you will realise that people vary even more than countries. Hearts are as diverse as the fauna on our planet. The variety of tastes in food, drink, music, art and clothes, the diversity of faiths, of life-styles, value-systems and politics, is as thought provoking as it is at times challenging and inspiring.

From what I have observed, people try to import what their Heart lacks. Hence the complementary characters of so many courting - as we used to call them -now ‘going out’ couples. The only things we can export are what we have within our Heart.

Bankers are all too aware of the 'Economic Cycle'. (*) It seems that luck – or is it providence? – has a similar game-plan. ‘Tides of fortune’ come and go. At least for me.

When people familiar with the Bible ask me how I am, nowadays I tend to say, ‘the cows are fat’, or ‘ they are thin.’ (Gen 41, 4 – 20).

Be aware of what there is within your Heart. If you know what is there you can prevent its export. You can deal with the problem and sort it out.

Chaotic people generate chaos. Calm people calm. Characters that are tense and anguished within can even disturb their environment.

In the late 80s, at Westminster Cathedral Clergy House, whenever a certain individual came near the photocopier, it stopped working. As it was impossible to get an engineer out on a Friday afternoon, that created problems for the whole weekend. She had to be banned from getting anywhere near that photocopier on Fridays. The strategy worked.

What I have experienced repeatedly is that when a Heart is at peace within, it tends to be at peace without: with its neighbours, and nature. Peace emanates from peaceful Hearts.

Peaceful Hearts attract peace. Genuine self-love and thus self-esteem generate inner peace, peace that they then export. Unhappy Hearts are prone to self-destructive accidents. So, beware!

Remember Frederick Nietzsche's "I might believe in the redeemer if his followers looked more redeemed."

In every Heart, there are spooky side-roads, amazing byways across the moors. Getting to know others, resonating with what is there within them, teaches us a great deal about ourselves. That, at times, can be rather daunting. However, far better to be realistic than not.

Late in life, I discovered how some people know how to charm, to schmooze, to seduce and to control. Some people are great actors and can fool you for ages. Since I am a romantic-idealist, it took a long-long time for me to be suspicious of what glitters as gold. As you age, you might become sceptical. However, if you can, avoid becoming a cynic.

You will learn that you need to give time time to reveal the inner reality of those with whom you would like to bond.

Some Hearts are like those early maps. "I have known him all my life. I don't know him at all." Even an accurate map of its coastline says nothing about Africa's hinterland. How well do you know someone? How well do others – bankers, dentist, doctors, friends, and the rest - know you?

Your own 'hinterland' might surprise you. Last week I thought I was fine. However, as I was about to get out of the rain onto a bus, I struggled to close my umbrella. The catch decided to get stuck. The bus was about to pull out. I suddenly surprised myself coughing up two Anglo-Saxon expletives. As I sat down in the bus, trying to avoid getting my trousers wet by that rebellious object, I realised I was not 'alright'. I had, indeed, been doing 'too much'.

Smiles are attractive and in our culture, typically, they are welcomed. However, in places where the devil seduces with smiles - and the KGB interrogator grins as he tortures - they are much more suspect. A clash of grim-versus-smiling cultures ensues, as tourists at Russian passport controls have often seen.

An exception was the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. The authorities made sure that every official smiled. Visitors returned home with great memories of their trip around what had once been the heart of the sour USSR.

Bear in mind that your Heart's emotions, passions and enthusiasms are unstable. A bit like our UK weather, they can suddenly turn nasty. Unhappy experiences can squeeze the isobars and a Heart's calm sunshine turns stormy

Etched in my memory is the Great Storm of the night of 15–16 October 1987 with its hurricane-force wind. The suggestion by the BBC's Michael Fish that the warning was a false alarm is celebrated as a classic gaffe. Better be cautious than over-confident.

Even worse than inner turmoil, in my experience, is the leaden, cold darkness of depression and emotional despair. Its close relative, indifference, suffocates the Heart. The Book of Revelation attacks the Laodicean syndrome and its apathy/indifference. “Be hot or cold”. The lukewarm will be vomited out of the mouth of the One who is Life. (Rev 3, 16)

Yet, a broken heart may be too vulnerable to commit itself again. Some are too sensitive ever to dare to love, once their Heart has been, as they might say, ‘devastated’. Maybe that explains why films about alien invaders smashing up our cities seem to be so popular. They may be a metaphor for assuaging fears of the Cold-War turning white-hot, but they also resonate with the experiences of all too many Hearts.

In my Heart model – you can develop your own - there are four ministries, each one looking after one of the PIES.

Do not forget that virtues are good habits. Both good and bad habits become ingrained by repetition. As we shall see in TB6, acquiring virtues improves life within a Heart, while increasing its abilities to export ever better products into its neighbourhood.

Weather does not respect frontiers. Emotions spread like wildfire between people. Our brains are wired to pick up and mirror the emotions of others.

When the government is open to the divine, the Heart is at peace, enlightened peace.

Some Hearts are very religious. Religion and religious imagery are a part of their atmosphere. Others are utterly secular. Some Hearts are isolationist. Their policies make them stand alone, not getting involved with the problems of others.

Think imports across the PIES. Medication can help the P, education the I, networks the E and prayer the S.

When a Heart is at peace, it is more likely to delight in solitude.

History has shown how pain has been able to mature some Hearts into the finest humans ever seen on earth. What we do, our exports and imports make us who we are.

Some, the proud and insecure, are terrified of a balance of payments deficit. In order to avoid any future obligations, they never accept gifts. They defend their position with “Neither a borrower nor a lender be; for loan oft loses both itself and friend.” [Shakespeare's Polonius in *Hamlet*.]

Wise Hearts know they need to forge alliances and work with as many allies-in-life as they can in order to fulfill their potential.

Fear, like extreme weather, can paralyse Hearts. However, flight - a state of emergency declared - flicking to fight, exports violence. When channelled, anger can become a powerful motivator. (*)

There are all too many Hearts infected by unhappiness. Guilt, factual or fictitious, blights many Hearts.

There are a few with vast reservoirs of good will, forever bursting with joy and laughter. They are there to help anyone in need.

Acceptance is a sign of maturity. We all need time to explore our Heart and accept, even embrace and learn to love, whatever is there.

Humanity's knowledge is accelerating. (**) However, the little history I have studied, suggests that human nature remains the same. I see no evidence of re-incarnation. Every child is born to suck its toes. Every generation has to learn from scratch.

Gradually I have had to explore my Heart and get to know myself. Like a baby sucking its toes, I got to know my limits. Growing up, I gradually learned to accept my intellectual limits and abilities.

Every weekday morning as I finish my warm-up ritual and am about to kneel down and then lift myself up to do those 85 push-ups,. Why 85? 83 years breathing + 9 months in my mother's womb , rounded off to the next integer = 85: one for every year of my life on earth.

I hesitate. The disloyal opposition starts muttering about my tiredness, and my need for a break. I tend to use a naughty word to shut that voice up. Then I get to work, using my pride and vanity to overcome my sloth and fear of pain.

(*) A handy trivial quiz question, "What is the only instrument Jesus Christ is recorded to have made?" Answer: a whip [Jn 2, 15]

(**) If you are interested in world history, I would suggest you read "The New Silk Roads" by Peter Frankopan

As I have found out, my Heart is not emotionally inert. When frustrated by what seems to me thoughtless or aggressive driving, instead of retaliating in kind, I vent emotional pressure by using language more at home on a building site than in a presbytery. So far, it seems to have worked.

This strategy has one serious flaw. My occasional passengers get shocked when they hear my expletives, especially if they do not know I was a civil engineer before becoming a priest. Luckily I tend to drive alone in the car so few witness my reactions to 'less-than-thoughtful-drivers'. I readily admit, "Thank God I have never carried a gun. If I had there would be some bodies along the line".

In line with many writers with whom I have spoken, whenever I start to think about writing, all sorts of distractions - shouted from the disloyal opposition benches – start to move centre-stage. ‘Sharpen that pencil.’ ‘Clean up that cup.’ ‘Wipe the table’. ‘Check your emails..... Again, only a shout from my Heart’s Cabinet Office - my will - stops that filibustering and here I am, once again writing.

You might be different. Maybe not. Good to be aware of what there is within your Heart and take evasive actions. Who knows why we are the way we are? Cartography of the Heart is one thing. Geology and archaeology something else. Why do I drive myself, doing my daily exercises and watching my diet, when deep down I yearn to die? Why are our Hearts the way they are? (*)

We see as we are. How else? We are as we have related across our PIES with our Self, Others, Nature and God [our SONG] (**)

(*) Hearts are conceived and born at specific times and places. Some say the time and thus the Zodiac sign under which you are born influences the shaping of your life.

(**) A theologian would say that, while in space-time, our lives are sacramental: the physical expressing and containing the spiritual emotional and intellectual. A moral theologian would say that that is why a physical-sexual expression of a relationship can ruin a heart-warming friendship.

Being means doing means developing being. I remember the Oxford graffiti, “ Doing is being, J P Sartre. Being is doing, J. S. Mill. Do, be, do, be, do. Frank Sinatra.”

How much of your Heart you know and how much - and to whom - you reveal its contents, is a matter of time and temperament.

To be honest with yourself is not the same as telling the whole world how you feel. To be loquaciously gregarious is not the same as being honest and self-aware.

Shakespeare knew Hearts better than most. His plays might help you to identify with many of the characters and hence discover the contents of your own Heart. Reading good novels, watching good plays on stage or screen, can help you learn a lot about yourself, as can reflecting on your own day before you go to sleep.

Only God fully knows what goes on in any Heart. The best I can do is to take care of what my Heart exports. My actions count, not my feelings.

We all tend to have things that are missing - a series of holes, even abysmal crevices and canyons. Like all ‘holes’, these are nothing. Yet, it is into that ‘nothing’ that you may fall and break your neck.

Within my Heart, there is an on-going struggle between good and evil. Occasionally a civil-war scenario between creativity and destruction, virtue and vice.

I prefer to see it as a competition, a match between the goodies and the baddies. Given those Seven Deadly Sins and their opposing virtues, some might say it is like a Seven-a-Side Rugby match.

It's pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth versus prudence, justice, temperance, courage (or fortitude); faith, hope and love.

Inspired by Churchill who hated Hitler and Stalin, yet sided with Stalin to beat Hitler, I use my vices to keep on in a civil war. Vanity fights gluttony, pride fights the others. Many of my virtues are the outcome of those wars.

My ethics are rooted in the ten commandments plus the eight beatitudes.

Always treat the opposition with respect! Knowing it is there, I can challenge and even channel its sublimated energies. My Heart's inner conflicts help me understand the behaviour and status of others.

In every Heart there is potential for destruction. Somewhere within most Hearts, there is guerrilla warfare. For some, it may be in their sub-conscious.

Within the Heart, electric storms produced by trauma, especially bereavement, break up communication. Some people, through trauma, life-styles, pain and much, much more are insensitive to the spiritual. They are like non-ferrous metals in a magnetic field: immune to its influence. Who knows why?

The Heart model has helped me understand the possible thoughts behind words, pain behind sneers and even hope behind a hopeless face.

Some Hearts are time-blind, some, time-bound. The former, the *mañana* merchants, make an appointment and turn up when they feel like it. Coming from Central Europe, I am of the second category: time-bound. Maybe it is my insecurity and fear of rejection if I were late. It might even be that I see wasting anybody's time is a lack of respect, an insult to his or her dignity.

Whatever the reasons, it was something I was encouraged to do, to be always on time, when training to row for ICBC. [Imperial College Boat Club, Putney.] Early winter-mornings on the Thames were sheer agony [Sloan's Liniment kept knuckles from freezing] - and bliss.

After a couple of late arrivals by lads who had enjoyed themselves a bit too thoroughly the night before, we agreed that anyone who was late would buy all the other eight a pint of beer. Every extra five minutes another round. From then on, punctuality prevailed.

What I now do know is that within my Heart there are so many different voices and stakeholders. Maybe that is why I tend to hate multiple-choice questions. So often it is not an 'either/or' but a 'both' and even 'many more' that is the least inaccurate answer to so much in my life. Hence, my feelings, even my reactions to a work of art or a menu at a restaurant, are often ambiguous.

Pride, what St Augustine of Hippo called "Original Sin" [Gen 3, 1-7] (*), is complex. It is a bit like cholesterol. There is the good variety and the bad.

Bad pride is arrogant, insensitive, disdainful, vain, conceited, narcissistic and snobbish. Good pride is the child of honest humility. It is feet-on-the-ground realism. Good pride is grounded, humble, stemming from *humus* [Latin for earth] .

Good pride admits our human dignity. It accepts things as they are; it recognises success and delights in positive outcomes. Taking pride in my work helps me to keep on going when the going gets tough.

'Nothing human is alien to me' means that I know I could, given the wrong circumstance, do anything as bad as anyone has ever done.

We never know how we will react if push comes to shove. Yet, when under pressure, decisions may be a matter of life or death. Pressure and stress reveal the real person. "There but for the grace of God go I" say I. Saying that, I do not joke.

Occasionally, in spite of myself, I export evil. I hurt others. Maybe like Judas Iscariot, [the word means 'dagger man'!] I have inner forces that propel me to act in ways that, with hindsight, I realise were wrong.

Morality

First poem I learned soon after arriving in a London from Prague in 1946

Good, better, best

Never let them rest

Until my good is better

And my better best.

Back in 1975, while teaching a class of 14 year olds ethics, a boy shot his hand up and declared " it's alright for you farver, you get paid to be good."

I love his view of priesthood. Whenever I repeat the story I add " I don't get paid very much. That's why I am not very good.

St Paul wrote to the Galatians (6,9) "do not get tired of doing good"

Love appreciates and respects: re-spects , looks again.

St. John Henry Newman reminded us that "to live is to change. To be perfect is to have changed often."

Love acts, not just speaks - as we were reminded in Mt 21,28-31 and the two sons.

Virtues demonstrate enlightened self-interest.

Sin, Chala in Hebrew , hamartia in Greek is 'missing the mark'. This word appears 181 times in the bible.

The sacrament of confession, nowadays called reconciliation is a bit like ceramic membrane technology which purifies water and makes it infinitely recyclable, reusable. Thanks to the sacrament of reconciliation, I know that falling down is not as important as getting up and keeping on keeping on helping God make my neighbourhood a better place.

(*) Rather than pride, Adam and Eve's 'mistake' demonstrated their ignorance, their stupidity. Unenlightened, their action was, if such a word may be used, un-ubuntu. Creating much unhappiness. Bad for everyone.

(**) You might be proud of your resilience as you picked yourself up after 'a bit of a mistake.'

However, it is my sins, teaching me compassion, that have made me more Christlike. As they say, 'what does not kill, nourishes'. [Ref. Rm 8, 28.]

Within each one of us, there is the whole of humanity; with its propensity to goodness and its capacity for evil. Realising your authentic self will furnish you with a firm foothold for the rest of your life.

A crisis flushes out the hidden weaknesses and strengths within a Heart. Sudden changes create vacuums and fluidities that vices can exploit. It is very hard to fight a dirty war with clean hands. (*)

God says, "My grace is enough for you" [2 Cor 12, 9]. The question is, but for what outcome? Given the gifts God has given me, what does God expect of me?

Never sure what is there in the Hearts of others, I never compare our performances. My job is to aim for my PB – personal best – leaving the lives of others for God to judge.

Many years ago – possibly 1975 - while I was trying to teach a class of fourteen-year-olds morality and ethics, a hand shot up: "It's all right for you, father! You get paid to be good."

Nowadays, when I tell the story I add "not being paid much, I am not very good." However, I do try.

If we click on a PC icon, we enter an area of information. If in real life we 'click' with a person we meet, we realise we are not alone and we import that presence into our Heart.

Once within, that Icon may become an *Anam Cara*, [Gaelic for ‘Soul Mate’] resonating with the one who is already there. If that happens, our Hearts come alive; they are set on fire [Lk 24, 32]. We experience love. One day, if not already, you may suddenly find that you are in love.

Remember that we do not learn from our mistakes. We learn from reflecting on our mistakes. ‘Why did I do that?’ ‘What led me to do that?’ ‘How can I avoid doing that in the future?’ are handy questions.

To listen to authority, to evaluate and learn from others, to decide what can enrich my Heart, is always worthwhile.

(*) When younger and faced with a scary interview, my inner tensions dropped when I say to myself “He also has to go to the toilet. Just like me.” Silly? Nevertheless, it does the trick.

Laughter, even forced laughter is good for the land of your heart, your physical and mental as well as emotional health. Laughter brings fresh oxygen to your brain and body. It releases the hormones of serotonin and dopamine, lifting your mood and reducing depression. It helps you avoid insomnia and improve cognition. It's good for your heart as it reduces blood pressure.

Laughter is contagious, enhancing your social connectivity. To maximise the benefits of laughter some folk join a laughter yoga group.

When was the last time you burst out laughing as you did when you were a child?

Depression caused by lack of bright light, contact with nature and its beauty, childhood - probably unadmitted - emotional, physical or sexual abuse or grief of many types, be these losses of job satisfaction or love, status, finance, fitness, looks or rosy future. It may lead to alcoholism, drug addiction and obesity. Exercise, friendships and prayer have - so far - protected me from the depressing effects of my griefs.

I have never come across anyone who has just fallen in love, being depressed, catching the flu or suffering from glandular fever. However, when people, both man and women have their emotional bonds shattered, all sorts of ailments often seep into their lives, generating tsunamis or earthquakes in the land of their heart.

The truth of the beatitudes.

As junk food for the body, junk values in the land of the heart do damage. Advertising, which is often there to make you feel inadequate and thus seduced to buy that product, can entice all too many to seek safety through retail therapy. How many homes have clothes, shoes, and so much more they never use. Think of the carbon footprint these have generated. Why not take the things you do not use to a charity shop?

Remember that some people are great actors. I have come across all too many suicides that came as a complete surprise the dead person's nearest and dearest.

Yet, my Heart cannot be isolated. As you may have already noticed, we are all interdependent. We are all members of our one Global City: the whole of our humanity.

I try not to judge anyone even though I must evaluate and perhaps carry out a Risk Assessment on their behaviour.

I try to love the sinner while I try to hate the sin. As soon as the negative 'exports' cease and there is a sign of regret, perhaps a 'sorry', I know I can relate with the actor and the reality of that Heart, knowing mine is somewhat similar.

Try to distinguish the action from the actor? The sinner from the sin?

Some people are as their Heart makes them: grumpy and humourless. Others are the life and soul of all parties, great for a holiday or weekend house party. Some are cavalry, others more like plodding infantry, less exciting but reliable and in the long run, more sustainable and sustaining.

I value and am intrigued by the way people live their lives, their life-styles and value-systems. The mystery of alterity is a hobby of mine. I prefer enabling and co-operating with, rather than controlling, the lives of others.

To help you think about their personalities, might you be able to compare people you know with these countries - if you are familiar with their geography and culture?

Country	Name of person
Bangladesh	
Brazil	
China	
Czechia	
Greenland	
India	
Nepal	
Nigeria	
Sudan	
Switzerland	
United Kingdom	
USA	

With which country you know would you compare your Heart ? (No need to tell anyone, but good to know.)

Everything we know, including ourselves, of course, has been created. Originally, Creation came *ex nihilo*, from nothing. Ash Wednesday liturgy, with its "remember, man, that you are dust and to dust you will return," (Gen. 3:19) reminds us of this inescapable fact.

You and I started life as a single fertilised ovum inside our mum. Now look at yourself!
“Great oaks from little acorns grow. No wonder we have crises of identity and worth, until we accept who put us here on earth and why.

We are here to learn to play our parts. Our conscience is the director of our play.(*)

Acknowledging that fact will set you free. You will, indeed, be blessed.

My self-confidence is not based on what I own nor on my track-record but on the conviction that I am a unique manifestation of God. By God, I am beloved. I stand on holy ground.

Radical honesty, especially with ourselves, is liberating. Science is debunking the age-old myth that men are essentially rational, women emotional. Whatever macho men like to think, it is far more of ‘E’, rather than ‘I’ that shapes their decisions, affecting their actions.

The 2017 Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded to Richard H. Thaler of Chicago University who, incorporating psychologically realistic assumptions into analyses of economic decision-making, explores the consequences of limited rationality, social preferences, and lack of self-control.

(*) All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,’ [As You Like It, by William Shakespeare]

I see myself as a four-dimensional creature made to the image and likeness of God. It is up to me to turn that image and likeness into reality. Work still in progress.

How about you? How do you see yourself?