

Two are better than one

A popular film laboratory in the city, I once visited on a regular basis so many years ago, was often a meeting place for professional photographers. These visits were frequently a source of surprise encounters. The details are no longer clear in my mind, but I do remember being invited by a couple of professional photographers, who posed this question.

“Would you like to come with us to Stradbroke Island this weekend? We are going to catch some big yellowtail kingfish.”

Who could resist such an invitation?

Once again, I am no longer able to recollect all the fine details of this fishing-trip, but one important part has remained fresh in my mind to this day.

I do enjoy fishing, but in moderation. My preference is for a couple of leisurely hours of quiet angling, and then return home, usually quite satisfied. It doesn't really matter whether a fish has been caught or not. The two friends, who had invited me to Stradbroke Island, had other ideas about fishing. It all became very clear when we stopped at the bottom of a rocky headland. These guys had carried a suspicious load of equipment to this point, I thought, and the reason for this became very clear. This was their regular fishing-spot. Apparently it promised a large haul of fish. All the equipment was suddenly unloaded near the edge of this rocky headland. One of my friends produced a long thick rope, onto which a grappling hook was attached.

“Watch out!” He shouted, swinging the rope and hook in a circular motion above his head.

We stood at a distance and then this hook went flying, about twenty metres across a deep ravine. A tuck and a pull dislodged the hook and so a second attempt followed. That one seemed to anchor, holding firmly to a massive rock outcrop on the other side of the ravine. The rope was then secured and tightened to a large rock on our side.

“I go first,” he said, the young man who had secured the rope. His experience with this kind of travel was obvious. Without hesitation he took hold of the rope, dangling his lower legs over the rope also, and with a swift motion he pulled himself with his hands to the other side.

“You are next.” I looked at him for a moment.

“Yes, your turn. I'm going last,” he stated, presenting me with a big grin. Perhaps it was an encouraging smile, because to my great surprise, fear and hesitation vanished as I took hold of the rope, scrambling across the ravine that was filled with the water of a calm ocean.

The next three hours were filled with hope, albeit a fading one. The yellowtail kingfish never took the bait. Our nets remained empty. There was no big fish to be carried home, and frankly, that reality filled me with considerable joy, because by now the ravine, separating us from the mainland was wild and foaming. The wind had increased substantially. The tide was rushing in and the waves grew larger by the minute. Our return journey, via this tightly strung rope, had changed into a very serious personal challenge. One person stood watch, observing the large breakers approaching, and then signalling an opportune time for

this dangerous crossing. I do remember getting wet, very wet. There I was, suspended upside down above the water; now within arm's reach. The large wave barely missed my back, rushing past noisily. Salty spray filled the air. All kinds of questions arose in my mind, including one that addressed my sanity. A great sigh of relief accompanied the safe arrival on the other side. Excellent teamwork had been on display, it occurred to me. We all looked back one more time across that boiling ravine, reflecting on our crazy achievements, and then we all burst into a hysterical laughter as a large breaker noisily filled the ravine once more. Despite many more visits to Stradbroke Island, I found it quite easy to avoid a repetition of this type of fishing.

Reflecting on this fishing-trip, so many years ago, it occurred to me that I would never have entertained crossing that ravine on Stradbroke Island on my own. The idea itself would have been far from my mind, because it was such a dangerous adventure. What did become clear was this; the one important reason for having entered into this challenge was the presence of my two friends, who assured me of my personal safety. This filled me with the necessary faith for this challenge. My friends were in possession of considerable experience, and so I trusted them.

In our journey through life, each one of us is faced with many ravines, which need to be crossed, to allow us to continue the important task of living, and journeying towards God.

What kind of ravines could possibly confront us, which you and I need to cross?

There are numerous deep and dangerous ravines along the way. Divorce can be one of those. Divorce is a formidable struggle, not just for the couple, but also the family members and friends, who are confronted with this dangerous terrain. The loss of our health, this also can be another serious challenge, crossing over from an active participation in life to the other side, a life filled with limited mobility in an aged-care facility or hospital and dependency on others. Our world is filled with dangerous ravines, which threaten our personal well-being, but we have an urgent need to cross those formidable gaps, to continue our journey through life.

In today's Bible readings we can witness God's love for each one of us personally, for you and me. Here are some of those words we listened to a little earlier.

"What God has joined together, let no one separate." and "let the little children come to me and do not hinder them."

"Two are better than one," King Solomon once wrote in the book of Ecclesiastes and I am experiencing and enjoying this blessing in my personal life. *"Two are better than one."*

My marriage to Eileen over these past seventeen years has been a wonderful blessing, a precious gift from God. No doubt, many of you can say likewise, having experienced a blessed marriage or friendship.

"Two are better than one." This is one good reason why we have entered the house of God this morning. Your presence can encourage me in my faith in Jesus Christ, and hopefully my attendance this morning will nurture your faith also. But there is so much more to be considered.

When you think about, you and I, we are also engaged in the activity of fishing, and not just for a couple of hours. Are we not fishers of men?

There is clear evidence that we are indeed fishers of men. The Lutheran Primary school, across the road, the Creche Kindergarten and the Grace Lutheran College, this church we are currently occupying, this is the living proof of our aim, "to know Christ and to make Him known." The human mind is being influenced in these Lutheran establishments, to make allowance for the presence of God in their personal lives.

Had my friends not been present on Stradbroke Island, I would not have crossed that dangerous ravine. It clearly highlights the importance of unity. We encourage each other in our faith and today it is through church attendance, but that is not what holds us together.

It is God, who connects us securely, because Jesus Christ has saved us from our sinful state. Jesus is our personal Saviour and Lord, and as a result we have become children of God.

"Two are better than one." God knows how important these words are, and for this reason He has provided us with a very precious gift, namely, the Holy Spirit. It is my belief that many of our answers can actually be found inside us, and Saint Paul seems to encourage this conclusion.

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price." (1 Corinthians 6:19)

You and I, we are the recipient of the Holy Spirit, a most precious gift from God. This Holy Spirit keeps us securely united with God. With God's Holy Spirit inside us, you and I, we can cross the most dangerous ravines which confront us, including death. It is God, who will take us safely to the other side of this frightening ravine, to a life with God in paradise.

"Two are better than one, but a cord of three strands is not quickly broken," because Jesus Christ is the solid rock we are standing on. And nothing in all creation can separate us from this wonderful love of God, in Christ Jesus, our Saviour and Lord. Amen