"Echoes of the Heart"

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Beyond regret. We all have our regrets, don't we? Things that if we had them to do over, we'd do them differently. Things said where, if we could go back, we'd either say them in another way or, perhaps not say them at all.

Regrets, over time, can build into a sort of *low level* depression to where they wear us down and sour our spirit. Regrets, too, of things undone, things we never followed through on; like finishing an academic degree or some certification program to further our career.

Perhaps our greatest regrets flow out of the choices we've made over family priorities and relationships. Many working parents, for example, reflecting back when their children were young, harbor deep seeded regrets at being so busy, so consumed with work or whatever that they missed out on their children growing up. And in a blink of the eye, their son or daughter was out the door, off to school or the work place.

We have regrets, too, in the financial arena. Choices we resisted making, risks we held back from taking. Thinking back, we lament: *we should have bought the house* or *made a particular investment*. If only we'd had more vision, taken the risk, and seen our future through more optimistic lenses.

Too hard on ourselves. The problem with the *regret game* (looking back and regretting one thing or another) is that—easily—we forget (or, we don't remember) what we were like at the time. We lose sight of the context and we're too hard on ourselves along the way.

Very possibly, at the time, we made the best decision we could. We were a different person back then. We had different concerns and a different conception of our life and the trajectory our life was taking.

Always, in life, we're evolving. We're growing to a new and larger sense of our self as a person. Our goals and priorities in life change as well. Not infrequently, unforeseen events—sometimes sad or tragic, other times joyful—intervene and catapult us into a new level of awareness and a new sense of values and priorities.

With all of these life-contingencies weighing in, sometimes we need to take a deep breath, stop beating ourselves up with regret and guilt, and grant ourselves the quiet grace and inner serenity for a fresh start.

So much of our lives is about the choices we make. Some choices, through no apparent fault of our own, turn problematic, if not disastrous. We simply could not have anticipated the outcome (Some investments I made years ago come to mind). And then

we exacerbate things all the more by not cutting our losses and moving on. To feel less guilty, we start trying to *fix it*, to some way *straighten it out* and *make it right.*

Some things we do—for which we perhaps harbor deep regret—can't be fixed. Trying to fix them only makes them worse.

Letting go and moving on. For all of us, there is a life beyond regret. To get there, we need to be honest with ourselves and take responsibility for the choices we've made in our life-journey. This may require a confessional gesture on our part. *Expressed regret* is a step on the pathway of *letting go* and being able to move on.

In the movie, *Mission*, one of the leading characters is converted from being a Brazilian slave trader to a Jesuit priest. However, realizing the depths of his sinful life, he insists on doing penance by toting a bundle of bricks over his shoulder in his new life of service to the Indians he used to enslave.

In a dramatic cliff-side scene, where the bundle of bricks almost makes him fall to his death, the Indians cut away the bundle—freeing him, symbolically and literally, from the guilt and regret of his past.

To whatever extent, we all have our bundle of bricks; bricks we need to get rid of to ease the burden. As we cast bricks away—one by one, or however we do it—our spirit is freed so that with mind, heart and soul, we can move on and live again.