

A problem is just a problem

In November 1989, I was stationed in El Salvador when the FMLN guerrilla forces made their last onslaught upon the capital city, San Salvador. They attacked from the north of the city, where our mission was located. I still recall bullets coming through the windows and my superior commanding me to “stay under that oak desk.” One of those evenings was when six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter were ceremoniously murdered by some in the Salvadoran army.

A few days later, I phoned my father back in Ardrossan. He had been in the army during World War II, in Burma. I told him about the situation, ending by saying to him, “so we have a problem.” His response was genial: “A problem? A problem is just a problem!” I sensed something of the never-give-in hardness of the soldier. By implication, what he was telling me was, “you will overcome this problem.” This article proves I did.

It hardly needs saying that problems of all kinds form part of the human condition. We can either lay down to them or take them in hand. We can either let them paralyse us in fear and despair or engage with them in confidence and hope.

St. Paul the Apostle tells us not to be mastered by evil but to overcome it with good. He was a fighter, like my dad. He fought battles far more serious than those in Burma: the battle against the influence, ploys and cleverness of evil. Our warfare, Paul once said, is not against flesh and blood but against the spiritual powers who would harm and destroy us. The victory over them? The love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord upon the Cross. The greatest problem is overcome by the greatest love.

(Published as “Thought for the Week”, Largs & Millport Weekly News, 5th June 2019)