

THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG

Young Australian cricketer, Usman Khawaja is the first Moslem to play for Australia. In an interview in the Herald this week, he said that for him religion comes first, then his family and then cricket.

His words give voice to a way of thinking about our priorities that marks much of our society. In all our lives we need to prioritise. Some tasks are more urgent. Some relationships demand more of our attention. Some areas of our life require our first and best energy while others need to wait.

Circumstances change all the time and we find ourselves needing to reassess some of our priorities in order just to get through the week.

Some sets of priorities, such as the ones mentioned by Usman Khawaja are longer term priorities and they tend to be set more firmly in our planning and living. Sometimes we have to make snap decisions regarding what takes priority at this moment.

Parents are constantly re-arranging their lives, balancing invitations to children's parties, the changing health of elderly relatives, a crisis meeting at school, a soccer final.

Sometimes important things get lost when we become too pressured to make decisions with clear heads. Weekend sport, parties, travel and church often compete with each other, and quite often it is church that misses out.

If we put religion first as our young cricketer says he does, then we can wonder if in a crunch situation his family would miss out on their proper place in his life.

We can come to grief when we allow our priorities to be in competition with each other. It could be the battle between work and family time, parenting and partnering time, prayer and recreational time.

In the Church we have managed over the ages to put our religious practice in competition with the other elements of our lives and sometimes people have been involved in church-related activities when they were more needed back at home.

Coming to our aid in all this is the genius of the gospel which remind us that every breath we breathe, every task we undertake, every relationship in which we engage can be enlivened, strengthened, infused with our relationship with God.

The living of our faith is not something over and against the rest of our life. We don't live in two separate spheres with secular things in one corner and sacred matters in the opposite corner.

St Paul tells us that whatever we're doing, eating, drinking, playing, resting, working, to "do all for the glory of God." Elsewhere he tells us to offer our whole lives "as a living sacrifice."

In other words, our central relationship with God can breathe through every moment of every day. This sense of God's presence can become like the breath we breathe.

When we're at play, when we're worried, when we are pressured, when we are enjoying our children, when we're working, God need never be far away.

Simply stopping once in a while and giving God a bit of a wink, a loving word of thanks, a cry for some help, takes no more than a few seconds. Getting into this habit of allowing God into every moment and every day takes a bit of practice.

A good place to start is to realise that my faith and the rest of my life don't need to be in separate compartments, in competition with each other. Once I allow myself to believe this to be true, God can weave a way through my daily living in such a way that he becomes a natural part of every task, relationship, activity.

Rather than being a competitor, God longs to be part of every bit of my life and waits for me to offer the invitation.

Father Kevin