

SPiRIT

PRAY Forgiving God, who doesn't need second chances? Help us never give up on ourselves because you never give up on us. Amen.

Second chances

You never studied and got a D on a geometry exam. Should you get a retake?



Your fielding error loses a game for your team. Should you be a starter for the next game?



You do not do an interview you promised for the school paper. Should you have to leave the staff?



You fail to get a committee to help with clean up after a school dance. Should your classmates make you a committee chair again?



You get a moving violation for failing to stop at a stop sign. Should you lose the right to drive until you are 18?



by Emily Maher

Life, as I knew it, was all over. If it wasn't, I didn't even want to deal with it after this, anyway.

There I sat on the curb, my face in my hands and the wet mist of a decapitated fire hydrant wafting over my hands and head. My car was to my left, straddling the curb

on the far side of an intersection I crossed every day. Dark skid marks trailed behind it on the concrete.

To my right a crumpled, black Mazda truck stood silent. The driver had swerved onto the lawn of a neighbor's house, where it hit the fire hydrant.

I do not drink, and I've never done drugs. As it turns out, I'm just that bad at driving my own car in my own neighborhood.

The whole fiasco began with this senseless horror flick that I watched with my girlfriend, Jenny. We couldn't stop watching; it was so disturbing. Then when it was over, Jenny realized she was a half-hour late for her curfew.

Second Chances



Hurrying to get her home, I sped out of my familiar cul-de-sac. I was fiddling with the radio as I headed out. Suddenly Jenny shrieked my name. Right in front of the windshield, I saw the black Mazda, halfway through the intersection. I was driving too fast. There was no preventing the collision.

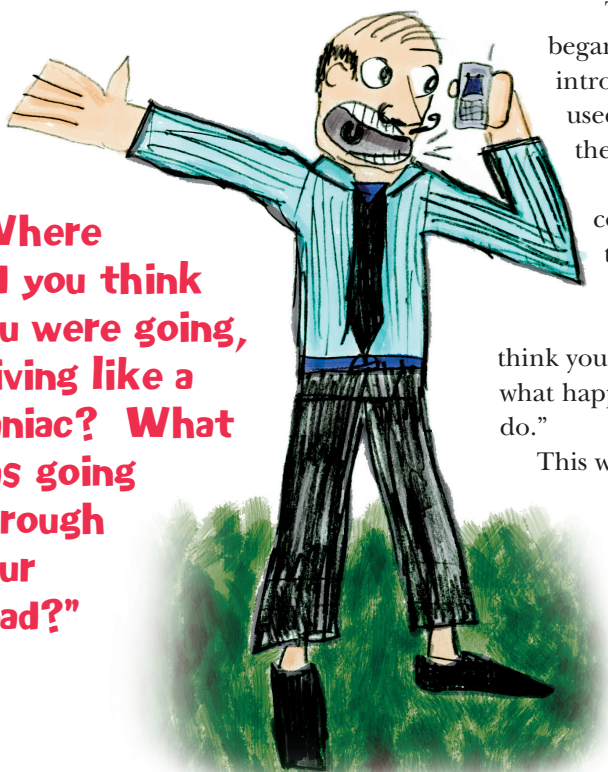
I slammed on the brakes, which flung both of us forward. My front fender banged the rear side of the truck bed, as I veered for the opposite curb. The impact sent the Mazda fishtailing into the center of the road, until it swerved off the street, colliding with a fire hydrant. The fire hydrant burst, spewing water all over the lawn, the road, and the crumpled black Mazda.

And there we were. I had just caused a car accident.

Finding myself unhurt, I reached toward Jenny and asked if she was injured. She pushed me away, yelling "I'm fine, I'm fine! Go find the man in the truck!"

Panic, guilt and, bewilderment registered in my brain, creating a swampy acrid taste in my mouth. What had I done?

"Where did you think you were going, driving like a maniac? What was going through your head?"



The door of the Mazda creaked open. A man about my dad's age but at least twice his size wriggled out from behind his inflated airbag. His face was red, and his eyes were bulging from their sockets.

I stumbled from my car, exuberant that he was relatively unscathed and yet totally disoriented that this accident had really happened to me.

We were but a few meters apart when the man began thundering a maelstrom of questions and accusations.

"What were you doing driving like that? Look at my truck! Just look, take a look at my truck! Where did you think you were going, driving like a maniac? What was going through your head?"

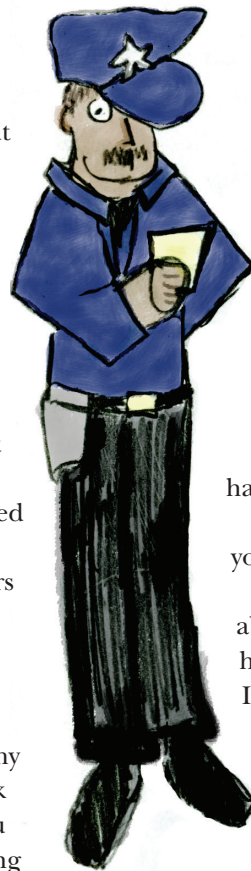
In this situation, I knew that I shouldn't say anything, so I remained completely quiet. The same questions were running through my head: *What had I been thinking? Had I even realized the possible consequences of my carelessness?*

The driver of the truck began to cool down. He introduced himself and then used his cell phone to call the police.

Meekly, I asked if I could borrow his phone to call my parents.

He handed me the phone, adding, "Yes, I think you should let them know what happened before the police do."

This was one of the more difficult phone calls I've ever made. When my father picked up the phone, his voice was groggy with sleep.



"So, son, what was going on tonight? Were you coming from a party?"

"Jason? Where are you?"

"Um, Dad, I'm really sorry. I have some bad news."

"What happened? Where are you?"

"I got in a car accident. I'm about a block away from the house. No one was injured. I'm so sorry."

At first the other end was silent.

"I'll be there in ten minutes. I have to get dressed."

After that was finished, I had just enough time to sit down on the curb, drop my forehead into my palms, and let my eyes blur as my brain attempted to absorb some of the shock. To me, driving seemed like an open road of new freedoms. Had the fact that I'm responsible for other peoples' safety ever crossed my mind? I'd never really thought it through.

It was only a moment before the police arrived. The younger officer went to talk to the man by his Mazda, and the older officer approached me. Jenny got out of the car and joined me on the curb.

"So, son, what was going on tonight? Were you coming from a party?"

I didn't want to break down in front of my girlfriend. I looked up at the officer. After taking a moment to collect myself, I could be relatively certain that my voice wouldn't crack.

"No, officer, I was coming from my home."

"Do you have your license and registration with you?"

SUNDAY GOSPEL

3rd Sunday of Lent

How many chances do we get?

NARRATOR: Some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate mixed with their sacrifices.

JESUS: Do you think these Galileans were the greatest sinners in Galilee because they suffered such things? By no means! But I tell you, unless you repent, you will all perish, too. Or, take those 18 in Siloam. A tower fell and killed them. Do you think they were

greater sinners than other inhabitants of Jerusalem? Not at all. But I tell you, unless you repent, you will all perish, too.

NARRATOR: Then Jesus spoke this parable.

JESUS: A man had a fig tree that had been planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the gardener:

MAN: Look here! For three years now I have come looking for figs on this tree and found none. Cut it down. Why should it take up space?

GARDENER: Sir, leave it one more year while I hoe around it and manure it. Perhaps then it will bear figs. If not, it shall be cut down.

Luke 13.1-9

The officer proceeded to ask me about the details of the accident. Before our conversation was over, my father was standing behind me, listening to my answers.

When the policeman finished questioning me, he acknowledged my father with a nod. "Is this your son?"

My father nodded slowly. I felt my stomach sink like a boulder in the ocean.

As the policeman began questioning Jenny, my father and I walked over to examine the car. He spoke in short serious sentences.

"No one was injured."

I shook my head.

"You were very lucky."

All the emotional restraint I had exercised collapsed under his stern gaze. "This was totally my fault, Dad. I can't believe it. I should have been watching, I should have been in control. What happens now? Will they take my license? Are you going to take my car?"

Dad stared at the ground. His hand covered his mouth; he was thinking deeply.

"No," he said, "The car insurance will go up, and you will get a ticket, but that's not really the point, is it? This could have been much worse. And if you don't learn from this, it probably will be."

My face was pale and solemn. "I don't know what to do."

"Learn," my dad said. "You're only going to drive with me for a while, not alone. You're going to learn, and re-learn, and re-learn."

Standing next to my wounded car, Dad was telling me how to deal with life: learn. Again and again and again.



QUESTIONS

- 1 What second chances does Jason get in this story?
- 2 What have you learned from having a car accident or being in one?
- 3 What second chances have you needed and gotten?
- 4 Why do people think victims of tragedy must somehow be to blame? What does Jesus think?
- 5 Is God more like the owner of the fig tree in the gospel or more like the gardener? Why?
- 6 When have you given someone another chance and had it bear fruit?

Consequences: How do I see them coming?

Jason's story describes circumstances that lead to his accident. First, watching "a senseless horror flick" makes his girlfriend half an hour late for her curfew. Second, the lateness leads Jason to choose to speed on the way to her house. Third, fiddling with the radio causes Jason not to see a black Mazda truck in the intersection until Jenny screams. Jason doesn't foresee the consequences of speeding and fiddling with the radio.

Consequences are the effects that our actions cause. The wise person anticipates consequences and considers them in making choices. But wisdom comes from experience, often from making painful mistakes and experiencing consequences. Sometimes we take a risk and the worst doesn't happen, so a risk seems worth it.

As we experience consequences, we learn to anticipate what can happen because of our actions. We become wiser just as chess players learn more moves and countermoves as they play the game. To win, chess players must set up strategies that lure opponents into actions with consequences they don't see coming. Read and discuss the situation below. The consequences really happened.

A friend plans to have a party when her parents go to visit her grandparents over a weekend. She gets really angry when her parents insist she go along. "You don't trust me," she tells them. They insist.

Your friend doesn't want to disappoint the people she has already invited to the party, so she gives you the keys to her family's home and tells you to have the party anyway.

You open the house for the party your friend can't have. You are flattered to be the one she chose. You know how clueless parents can be about what is really important.



The Word of God is a light for our path. We must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. This is how moral conscience is formed.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #1802

Word gets out. The friends you know bring friends you don't know. Two kids bring beer. Someone gets into the family's liquor. Kids start drinking. Only then do you think what if kids break something or steal something or trash the house. You hope for the best. After all, these are your friends.

What you don't realize is that the neighbors know the family is away. When cars begin to park along the streets and lights appear in the house, they call the police who arrive with the party in full swing. The officers move everybody out.

Everyone knows you are the one who opened the house and has the key. For doing what your friend asked, you get arrested and charged with breaking and entering.

Your parents have to come to the police station to get you. You face court appearances and a possible felony charge. Should you have foreseen these consequences in doing what a friend asked? Should you be charged with breaking and entering? What should each girl's parents do?

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Identify a consequence you didn't see coming. Consider why. How could you have anticipated it? Who is to blame? What should each girl's parents do?
- 2 Identify a choice you face. List all the reasons for and against the course of action you want to follow. Ask a peer to evaluate your list. Ask an adult whose opinion you value. Compare their responses.
- 3 Practice prayer in a new way for the rest of Lent. Meditate on the Sunday gospels, take a reflective walk, think of a person you don't like with love each day. Discover the consequences of your prayer.