Reflection on Augustine Raymond JNC Cruz

“Learning from Mistakes”

In his theory, Augustine points out that the cause of moral evil is man himself by his choice of evil, for unless the will chooses evil it cannot do evil. Evil can be the result of an inordinate love of something that is good in itself. Attachment to a particular good leads man to disregard the greater good. Evil, or sin, is a product of the will. It is neither ignorance nor the work of the principle of darkness permeating the body. Augustine states that “man needs divine grace in order to be good and direct his love to its proper object.” In another statement, he says that “man now uses his free will to choose wrongly”, and similar to a former statement, “man needs the grace of God to do good.”

One such instance of inordinate love is a certain incident in high school, which led to a major disciplinary case. Included in my clique was a very troubled person, and we understood why, since he had problems relating to his family. He had a tendency to do unsavory deeds, but since we were young and carefree back then, we didn’t mind much and even saw him as one of the “cool people.” During our senior year, he had started stealing from others, mostly our classmates. At first, he started pilfering small items, such as pens and snacks. Soon afterwards, he was already stealing money from bags. During the lunch break, we would all vacate the classroom to head to the canteen. According to school policy, no one was allowed to stay inside the classroom during lunchtime. He would often stay behind, conduct his “raid”, and leave only a little later after the last person had left. We didn’t mind as long as he didn’t steal from us. In addition, I found out much later that most, if not all, of my friends received cuts from his pillaging. My friends and I would soon become assist him in his plunder, and this would earn him the moniker Mastermind. At this point our morals were already blinded by the lucrativeness of our spoils. We even extended our operations outside of school and looted the nearby SM mall. Since we weren’t caught, we continued our “adventures” without fear of consequence. Our last adventure, however, ended badly. Mastermind had stolen our classmate’s cellphone and taped it outside our classroom’s outer wall. The victim noticed his phone was missing, and after dismissal, everyone was ordered to stay and a search was organized by the class president. When the search came out empty-handed, the class president systematically interrogated us. Mastermind was eventually discovered, and the phone returned. From that point on everything was revealed. All our thefts in school were made known. We got reported to the school prefects, got a disciplinary case filed, and received suspension and community service as sanctions. We even considered ourselves lucky to have graduated at all, even though Mastermind wasn’t allowed to attend the commencement exercises.

Of course when a sanction is received by a student, the student’s parents are made aware of this as well. My parents were most displeased with my implication in the case. Through their sermons, I realized how morally blinded I was. At first, I already knew that what Mastermind was doing is wrong, but I kept silent and went about an apathetic attitude about it. What was worse is that my apathy, while already a sin in itself, led me to greater evil i.e. being an accomplice. I had become attached to the good of helping Mastermind since he was part of my clique, and I had given in to peer pressure since I saw what I was doing was good. I also saw good in theft, since my friends and I benefited materially from it, but moral blindness kept me from being aware of the effect of our actions on others. Following this, I have disregarded the greater good and substituted it with evil: the criminal activities. My free will was exercised, but I had chosen wrongly. I failed to choose the good. I really needed God’s grace at that time. Up to date, I have considered that to be the greatest mistake of my life.

I found one particular statement towards me by the class president striking: “*Kung kaibigan mo talaga [si* Mastermind*], dapat pinagsabihan mo imbes na tinulungan mo magnakaw.*” This particular statement changed my moral grounding towards others, especially to those who are my friends. From that point onwards, I have done my best to be a moral conscience to others, especially when they are faced with a moral dilemma. I try not to be apathetic towards others and their failure to do good. While it may sound intrusive to others, I know my boundaries and keep myself within them, but I do not hesitate to step over when needed. Today, in college, there are many situations involving my friends in which I felt needed my moral intervention, which I provided. It is both challenging and rewarding at the same time, because others’ moral values are sometimes more or less as justified as mine are, and if they prove to be right, then I would have gained a new moral insight as a reward. This is a good thing because all people have different moral standards, therefore creating conflicts on moral issues. By understanding others’ morality through insight, one can come to terms with another in resolving an issue dealing with morality. I am not saying that by being a moral conscience for others I am always right. As a human being I am still subject to mistakes. I still often realize that what I previously thought good isn’t really good, or it is only good depending on the situation. But compared to before, I am now much more confident in making moral decisions because I am now aware of God’s grace, and every time I need guidance I just pray and ask for it, and reflect upon the situation I am currently facing. Eventually, I can make my choice, do it, and believe it is good since God has provided my with His grace, and it is only through it that man can do good.