

Would you like to swing on a star . . . Or would you rather be a mule.

That's from the opening lines of a Van Heusen and Burke creation that received the Academy Award for Best Original Song in 1944 – sung by Bing Crosby in *Going My Way*, a film that won seven Academy Awards (including Best Picture) that same year. You may have seen a rerun on the Turner Classic Movies channel. I saw it at least once when it first came out.

It's about Father O'Malley, a priest in New York, sent to administer a parish in place of its old Irish-born pastor Barry Fitzgerald – while also maintaining a pastoral role with the youth of the parish's tenement residents. It's an extremely sentimental film by today's standards, especially its closing moments when the old pastor is surprised by a visit of his ancient mother from Ireland. Tear ducts overflowed. Fr. O'Malley was of course an exemplar of kindness and dedication to his calling – an image (in my own imagination at the time) of the Church's clergy in general.

In working with the parish youth (including some young kleptomaniacs) he not only organizes them into a choir but, being Bing Crosby, serenades them toward a better moral life – as in the lyrics of that song:

Would you like to swing on a star / Carry moonbeams home in a jar / And be better off than you are / Or would you rather be a mule?

A mule is an animal with long funny ears / He kicks up at anything he hears / His back is brawny but his brain is weak / He's just plain stupid with a stubborn streak / And by the way, if you hate to go to school / You may grow up to be a mule.

Those lyrics are hardly classical yet they echo in a Tin Pan Alley way today's reading from St. Luke's Gospel about knowing what you are getting into when you become a follower of Christ. It means getting off your duff! No half-baked efforts – like that of - let's say - Great Britain in the 1930's which, despite the warnings of Winston Churchill, refused to face up adequately to the threat of Fascism at that time – and later had to endure the calamity of Dunkirk (if anyone remembers).

In today's Gospel Jesus makes himself clear about the demand his Gospel makes upon us – if we are serious. We must make behaving like Christ our top priority, go all out when it comes to love, faith, hope. Luke illustrates this demand even more so in the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin that follow today's reading.

In the one you leave all your worries and distractions behind to concentrate on rescuing one lost sheep and experience the joy of finding it – that lost sheep being your very self as you have never known yourself to be. And the same goes for your finding that one lost coin – however large your actual bank account may be – insofar as that lost coin is the authentic you, worth so much more than the devalued *you* you think you are. Nor is that the end. For in finding your lost self – what more do you find? Everyone else – whose divine worth you failed to recognize insofar as you failed to recognize your own! Or would you rather be a mule?

Geoff Wood