

“VIETATO LAMENTARSI” is writ large on Pope Francis’s Vatican apartment door. I know at least three people of hidden linguistic talent around here (Gabby, Henrietta, Wanda - sistren, I’m impressed!) who could tell you it means “complaining forbidden.” Of the various newspapers’ translations, the Telegraph’s was my favourite: “no whingeing!” I’m becoming quite a fan of this Pope.

Following his “commandment” is a prophecy: if you whinge, you’ll develop victimhood syndrome, reducing your sense of humour and therefore capacity to solve problems. And the notice ends with good news: “To become the best of yourself, focus on your own potential, not on your limits. Stop complaining and act to change your life for the better.”

Francis has been known for his “direct language,” indeed, he has referred to miserable Christians as having faces like “pickled peppers.” We should, of course, be joyfully praising God for creation and Jesus’ promises of salvation and true life.

Whining is not to be confused with appeals for justice or with the groans of suffering; that’s another matter entirely. It’s not even to do with just getting something off your chest in the company of trusted friends. It is, on the other hand, about what whiners do to others and themselves. To others, because they transfer negativity; to themselves, because time wasted in whining is time that could have been focussed on joy.

As a young marine, the “three-badger” (senior marine) in my mess deck literally thumped people who whinged; the expectation was that we thought about the problem and either found a solution or just lived with it. (Expectations of a punch on the nose produced a remarkably rapid learning process!) This actually engendered a very happy living environment.

So, is “vietato lamentarsi” actually scriptural or just psychology? The people Moses led through the wilderness were always whining about something or other - and it took them forty years to obtain the promised land. Jesus’ disciples were full of joy after his resurrection, continually giving thanks to God; they obtained Jesus’ promise - God’s Holy Spirit - in fifty days. I rest my case, m’lud...