



Goodbye - 22nd June 2006

My leaving Reading, this coming Monday, is bringing to mind the many other “leavings” in my 35 years of priesthood - and how hard it is to say goodbye to friends made in the place you have been. In fact, it is only when you say goodbye that you really appreciate the friendships you are leaving behind - and this is made particularly true when you are going to a strange place where you know no one.

This journey to a “new place” will be my fifteenth since becoming a priest and on only two of those journeys did I travel with a friend. On all the others I went alone - and felt the pinch of loneliness when I arrived. I remember, in the weeks after my arrival, praying, “Lord to send me a friend” - but, as I look back on those times, I realise that the ones, who were to become my close friends, were already in place. The Lord had already provided them, even before I arrived. What my prayer did was to let the Lord into my situation and gently open my eyes and my heart to see who those “friends-in-waiting” were. When I turned and asked the Lord to be with me in my need, he redeemed the situation - and that is what “redemption means”.

Francis of Assisi told his followers, “Go out and preach the Gospel - and if you have to, use words!” We so often think of our Faith in terms of words and doctrines, but it is primarily something to be lived. If Jesus is to be my Redeemer, then I must let him redeem my living. I must let him into the broken, lonely, “not-yet” parts of my life. That is what needs to be redeemed - “me, where I am”. Just as he put my future friends in place before I ever asked, so he won the redemption on Calvary long before I was born - but I still have to invite him in so that he can make that redemption real in me.

This truth-for-living, does not just apply to loneliness but to every broken and sinful part of my life. To be freed I must invite him in - but there’s the nub! It seems to be ingrained in us that if we have got ourselves in a sinful situation, we feel that we have to get ourselves out of it before we approach Jesus. This is wrong. We have to invite him into the sinful situation - whatever it is - so that he can redeem it. Julian of Norwich, one of my great spiritual teachers, talks about “the kingly homeliness” of Christ. The word “kingly”, refers to the courtesy of Christ - he waits patiently to be invited into our lives and will not enter unless he is invited. This is not because he does not care, but because he cares too much! He has immense respect for our dignity and will not push in uninvited. With the second word, “homeliness”, Julian is saying that Jesus will come wherever he is invited - and will make his home there, with us. This is another truth pointed to in doctrine. The Apostles’ Creed says, “he descended into hell” and this means that if I have got myself into hell he will look for me to be with me, and by his gentle presence, he will change me and the situation and he will lead me home.

Jesus, our Redeemer, is not the reward for our pulling ourselves out of trouble - he is the means of doing it. When I am in drowning in a situation and can’t find the way out, when I am in the midst of temptation and can’t find the strength to resist, I must call out, “Lord, don’t leave me alone with this!” It may give you tingles to say this; you may feel that it is wrong to ask the Lord into where you are at that moment - but to be redeemed, you need a redeemer - and you have one waiting; waiting to be asked.

In the weeks and months ahead, I am sure that I will feel the pinch of loneliness, when I remember you. But because the Lord gave you to me as friends, I am sure that he has already put new friends in place where I am going. They will never be able to replace you, but I will know how to look for them because I will remember how I found you.

So, thank you all for your companionship and friendship during these ten years here in Reading. We have shared the journey for a while, and, I hope, supported each other on the way. May you find many new friends along the way, friends who will show you the face of the Lord who journeys with us; and, one day, when all has been completed and made well, may he bring us all home!

Goodbye and may God bless you always,
Terry

Thank you, Lord - 14th June 2006

My Aunt Mary had a custom of when leaving a place, where she had been staying - even for just a few days - she would stand at the door of the house as she left, hold a small medallion of the Sacred Heart, which she always carried, and say, “Thank you, Lord for the lovely times we have had in this house.”

These little devotions often hold within them great spiritual insight and this one is no exception. It brings home to us that wherever we are, wherever we are living, the Lord is also there - if only we will let him. Moreover, this is true not only of the houses that we live in, but also of the physical, mental and spiritual conditions in which we dwell - and this

is sometimes much more difficult to grasp. We can, usually, be easily aware that the Lord is with us, and thank him for being there, when we feel good and things are going well for us, but when we find ourselves sick, or in mental or spiritual turmoil - then, it becomes much more difficult. At such times, we often see God as being outside the place where we are and our prayers, such as they are, are addressed to this "outside God" asking him change our situation and make it better - but it is so often the outer conditions we are asking to be made better for then, we think, everything will be fine. However, our Tradition and, indeed, our own experience, if only we will look at it, shows us that God works in the opposite direction - from the inside outwards and by so doing changes the whole situation.

When we first experience sickness or turmoil, we experience it as preventing us from doing things, but the coming of the Holy Spirit can change the heart of these situations. I have seen, for example, people with terminal sicknesses give themselves into the hands of the Lord and let him in to share their sickness with them. I have seen how the Lord can change these sicknesses from within and made them occasions of bringing the sick person and their loved ones far closer together, so that although the time they have together is shortened it is made much richer - so that sometimes they even say, "I am grateful for that sickness for we would never have been as close together without it."

This insight into how the Lord works is also vital, when we find ourselves in periods of mental and spiritual turmoil. We so often consider these periods as sins and thus close ourselves off from the Lord - whereas we need to do the opposite and invite him in. This is particularly true, I think, in the area of our sexuality. We often consider our sexuality as leading us into temptation - whereas, in fact, it is the great gift that God gives us to lead us into love. It may drag us out of our self-absorption - sometimes screaming! - but we are brought to notice and be drawn to others. This process is unruly, for such powerful forces are involved, but this is why we need to invite the Lord into our sexuality so that it may be transformed from within and lead us into the love and caring for which it is given. But, this process takes time and we need to give the Lord the time to work in us. We may not like the slowness at which we are progressing - but the Lord is very comfortable with it.

We are very good in our Tradition of speaking about the ideals, but then forget to speak about the journey to get there. We are on a journey, with the Lord, towards these ideals, we cannot take them on board all at once and if we try by our own effort, we may come to some outward form of virtue, but the inner turmoil will go on causing havoc and pain within. Only the Holy Spirit can bring us the peace of heart of which outward virtue is the sign. Once we have invited the Spirit into our inner struggle to slowly transform it into goodness - we are no longer formally in sin - even when from the outside it may appear so. (If you do not understand this bit then please write and ask me about it) In fact, the idea that you yourself and by yourself have to control yourself may produce an outward appearance of virtue - but it may be so rigid that it blocks the vital work of the Spirit. A pithy AA epithet says, "What we believe in is spiritual progress not spiritual perfection".

We proclaim Christ as our Redeemer. He came - he comes to me - to transform sin and chaos into something wonderfully new and good. If we proclaim this, then why are we so reticent about inviting him into our hearts and lives, when they are in the turmoil, which we often label "sin" - but is, usually, just the process of growth? He will gladly come to us wherever we are, if we but invite him. There is no condition or place wherein he will refuse to be with us. The whole gospel shows that - and so does the custom of my Aunt Mary when she used to thank the Lord on leaving a house.

God Bless,
Terry

THE ADVOCATE (2)

Hello to you all, *(I apologise for this being rather long!)*

As 26th June draws nearer, I am reminded of other places I have left and the most traumatic, by far, was the time I had to leave Borneo after 13 years there. It was my first appointment as a priest and, during those years, it had become my home and although I had always known that my time there was limited, it was still a terrible wrench when I finally had to leave.

I had been working harder and harder as the time to leave drew nearer, trying to get things completed and so gave myself no time to sit and think - foolish! And, somewhere along the line, I also contracted Hepatitis A, so when I finally arrived back in UK - in Reading, actually, because my Mother was living here - I just had time to say "hello" to people before I collapsed and was taken to Battle Hospital, where I stayed for a month.

There I had time to think and went into a deep, deep depression. I looked at the things I had done wrong and they blotted out everything else. I became convinced that my whole priesthood was a disaster and a betrayal of my God - and that he, my God, was looking at me in disgust. I was in blackness!

From this point in time, it is interesting to remember that I did not stop praying. I said the prayers in my breviary every day, but I did not dare look up to heaven as I did so - until one day, I threw the breviary on my bed, dared to look at my God and say, "I can't go on like this. I can't go on not knowing if you still love me. I can put up with everything else, but only if I know you love me." I found myself saying, "I need a sign, something that will tell me that you love me. If you love me....", I hunted in my mind for something I could ask for as a sign and my thoughts went to the liver biopsy that the doctor had just told me I would have to have about a month later, ".... stop that liver biopsy!"

I was not frightened of the test, although I might have been had I known what it would entail, but it was a concrete thing, by which I would know whether the sign had been given. Having said that, I bowed my head once more and went back into the darkness.

I left hospital and went home - hardly the life and soul of my family! - and a month later I came back to the hospital for the test - but by this time I had forgotten what I had asked for. They took my blood and marked out my belly, where the needle would go in, and the doctor arrived to perform the biopsy. He looked at the results of my blood test and said, "The blood is not clotting fast enough. Give him a vitamin K injection and we will do it tomorrow." So I was given the vitamin K injection and spent that night in hospital. The next day, my blood was tested again and my belly marked out again for the needle and the doctor arrived again. He looked at the blood results and said, "His blood is still not clotting quickly enough. Put him on a vitamin K drip all night. That will fix it." So, I was attached to the drip and spent a second night in hospital. The following morning, I went through the ritual again and the doctor arrived a third time, looked at the blood results and said, "How odd! His blood is still not clotting properly." Then he turned to me and said, "I think we will forget about the biopsy. It was not really important anyway. You may go home." So I dressed, said goodbye to my companions in the ward and went out to catch a bus home. I remember it was a cold and rainy November day. One of those depressing English days which carry not a hint of hope. I stood there, at the bus stop, feeling dead, as I had for months, when suddenly I realised that what I had asked for - the sign - had been given. It was as if the sun suddenly shone on that damp, dreary Oxford Road bus stop - I was loved! The world was still a shitty place and my future - what future? - but I was loved and that meant that the rest did not really matter. I had someone beside me, someone within me, someone to travel on with. I was loved!

The depression did not disappear on that day, but it did slowly fade as the weeks and months went by and I was led to new places and met new people. But the heart of it was taken away on that day and much more besides. I learnt that I must not identify myself with the things I do. I learnt that we must not call ourselves names and then imagine that God is saying that. (My Spiritual Director once sharply rebuked me for this, "God does not call people names", he said, "except your own true name spoken in love. Those names you hear come from you, not God.")

I also remember learning that the Holy Spirit was called "The Advocate" and was given to defend me. The Devil might try to make me believe that I am rubbish and worth nothing. He might accuse me before God (*Rev. 12:10*), but we have been given someone much more powerful - the Advocate who always pleads my cause. He, I now see, was the one who led me to throw aside my prayer book and ask my God for a sign. He, I now know, was the one who told me that I was loved. He, I do believe, is the one who will slowly transform my inner being so that, one day, my failures and wrongs will be seen as stages on my journey into God and not evidence of who I am. The Advocate is the promise of the Lord to us, a promise which cannot fail, and one day, we shall love the Lord my God will all our hearts and souls and strength - the Lord has promised he will do this on the day he gave us his Spirit.

God bless,
Terry

The Will of God - 1st June 2006

One of the phrases my late Aunt Mary often used was, "If it is God's Holy Will" and she meant it. If something was the Will of God, then she accepted it.

However, discerning the Will of God is not as easy as it, at first, appears. For instance, when my Aunt was diagnosed as having cancer, she was advised to have chemotherapy, but whether it was because she has seen the effects of chemotherapy or not and this had frightened her, I do not know, but she balked at the idea, saying, "If it is God's Holy Will that I die of cancer, then I will accept it." My cousin John, however, countered this by saying gently, "Aunt Mary, it may be God's Holy Will that you have chemotherapy". And here lies the crux of accepting the Will of God - how do you know what it is?

One thing we do know is that disaster, sickness and sadness in this world do not come from God. He is not a Pawn-master dabbling daily in the doings of this world and handing out benefits to one and pain to another. The world and the people in it are perfectly capable of doing this by themselves. To accept something, because you believe that everything comes from God, is wrong theology. God does not send the crises and pain that come upon us - but he can and does use them for our good. So it is not a matter of accepting them as God's Will, but accepting that the Lord can turn them to our good and the good of others - if we but entrust them into his care.

But, here lies another problem. We are so often convinced that we know the way out of bad situations and we often just assume that there is no other way, part from our way of looking at it. Thus, when we pray, our prayers consist in telling God what to do - and that does not work. God has immense love for us, immense respect for us, wishes to be in fellowship with us - but as God, not as a servant. He will turn all things to our good, even the greatest disaster, but in his own way and according to his own wisdom. So, my Aunt Mary was right: the way forward is by accepting "God's Holy Will", but not by accepting that what has happened is the Will of God, but by accepting that the way forward - if it is to be turned into goodness - must be according to the Will and Wisdom of God. We are saved by faith, by trust and this means trusting God with our problems. It is another way of looking at the offertory of the Mass - I bring my bread and wine, so that the Lord may do something wonderful with it - something way beyond all I could imagine or desire.

However, although this act of trustful offering always must form a part of my friendship with the Lord, there are also times when action is also demanded and I have to decide what to do. How, at such time, do I know what God's Will is? The answer is, "I don't!" I have to look at the situation and try, by God's grace, to make sense of it. I have to listen with both my head and my heart - for as Pascal says, "The heart has reasons that reason does not know", but finally I may have to decide is to be done. But, even here I need to let the Lord in. I need to come before him and say, "Lord, I am going down this path. I have looked at the situation and it seems to me that it is what you would want. I give you my heart and I give you my head so that you may change my wanting and my thinking if I am on the wrong track. I have no other way of knowing your Will and so I am walking in trust. If I am going wrong I trust you will get me out of it and put me on the right path. I trust you because you love me"

How could any lover resist such an appeal? Such an act of faith opens us to God's heart. This is what it means "to walk in faith".

My Aunt listened to my cousin John and through his words her head and heart were touched. She took chemotherapy and had two more years among us - years in which we, her family, grew closer to her and to one another. They were good years, healing years, years whose effects remain with us still. Her illness and her death were turned into a great blessing for us and for many others - such is the transforming Will of God.

God Bless,
Terry

Pentecost Novena - 24th May 2006

I cut my lawn yesterday, managing to get it done in between the showers, and, as I put the mower back into the garden shed, I was reminded of John, an old Tramp, who used to sleep there when he was in this area, and I realised that I missed him.

John had been homeless for many years, but he used to come to my house about once a month for a cup of tea and a sandwich - and, just before he died, also for a little money to buy himself a drink before he went to sleep. As I stood there thinking about him I realised that I used to think of John as someone I helped, someone who came to me in his need, but yesterday I saw that John was also a man who helped me.

There is something in us that needs to reach out to others: to care, to share to cross over the boundaries that we discover round us. Only then do we become who we are. But to do this, we also need someone to reach out to, someone who will accept our care and so enable us to be. So, as I finished putting the mower away, I said a prayer of thanks to John for inspiring me and enabling me to care - and, above all, receiving that care so graciously.

I think John would be a good Patron of the Pentecost Novena which we begin this Friday. In this Novena we pray for the gifts of the Spirit: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, Fear of the Lord. The way we list these gifts leads us to understand them as "strengths" given to us - given to you and me to make us good Christians, good human beings. When looked at this way, I was the one with the Gifts and old John who benefited from my strengths. But... how could I be wise, unless John had come to me? How could I be understanding, unless John had dared to ask for help? And so we can go on with all the so-called "strengths". Standing at my garden shed, I began to see that these Gifts are given to us to as a People - not as individuals; they are given to make us one, not to make us feel good. They enable someone to be a Giver, but to do this also requires someone willing to be a person in need. They can make someone a gracious giver, but only because they have graced someone else to dare to be vulnerable before another person - graced someone to dare to be John!.

As I closed my shed door, I realised that the tables had turned. I had thought of myself as the giver and John as the receiver, but now I saw that when John stood there before me at my front door, in all his vulnerability, he was offering me a gift far more precious than anything I could offer him and I also saw in which of our two faces would have shone the face of God.

God Bless,
Terry

The Holy Spirit - 18th May 2006

One of the saddest scenes in literature, I feel, occurs in Charles Dickens' Christmas Carol. Scrooge, a wealthy, but bitter and lonely old man, is taken by the Spirit of Christmas past to look at himself as a young man. The Spirit "softens him up" by showing him how he was loved - first by his sister and then by a beautiful young woman, who became his fiancée. Scrooge, however, became hooked on money and on the power and security he thought it would give him and the time came when he had to choose between his fiancée and his love of money - and he chose money. In that terribly sad scene, Scrooge watches again, as his fiancée gives back her engagement ring to his younger self and then sadly walks away. The older Scrooge calls out to his younger self, "You Fool! Go after her; don't let her go!" But, the now wiser Scrooge, with tears in his eyes, has to watch as his younger foolish self lets her walk away.

Despite great moral parables, like that of Dickens, we still see the tragedy of Scrooge acted out all round us, often in small things, but sometimes in great. We see people of vision, of hope, of passion being inspired to dream and then faltering as they begin to reason that it would be better to get themselves settled professionally, socially - financially -

before they embark on their dream; and then later they realise.....!

One of our difficulties, when we are faced with such decisions, is that we mistake “reason” for “wisdom”. “Reason” is logic; it deals with the head, not with the heart. It sees many important things - but not all of them. “Wisdom”, on the other hand, deals with “value” and judges the comparative value of things. It deals with what the Bible calls “the heart”, a region into which the rationality of the younger Scrooge cannot enter. It is of this wisdom that Pascal spoke when he said, “the heart has reasons that reason does not know”.

In “A Christmas Carol”, the Spirit of Christmas past enables Scrooge to look back and see the foolishness of his youth. But are we doomed to gain wisdom only in hindsight, when the damage is done and cannot be repaired? Dickens himself provides part of the answer to this. By showing Scrooge the past, the Spirit enables Scrooge to gain wisdom and so heals the man who was so foolish in his youth, thus ensuring that his foolishness is not repeated. That same healing Spirit - the Holy Spirit - is also a reality in our lives; it is the Spirit who leads us to look back on our past so that we also may grow in wisdom and be healed. However, in Dickens, it was chance - or maybe the prayers of Marley - which brought to the Spirit to Scrooge, whereas for us, we know the Spirit is given to each of us by the Lord. Like Scrooge, we do not choose what to look back on or when - that is the Spirit’s agenda. Like Scrooge, we need to grasp the opportunity to look when it is given. However, unlike Scrooge, we also know how to pray for the coming of that Spirit - and we are now very near to the time when our Tradition calls us to join in such prayer.

God Bless,
Terry

Holy Thursday Morning - 11th May 2006

At 3am, last Holy Thursday morning, my phone rang. It was the hospital asking me to come and anoint an old lady who had been brought in with a stroke. Knowing I was facing a long three days of Easter services, my heart sank a little and so I asked whether it could wait until the morning. The nurse told me that she was not in immediate danger of death, but that her husband had asked that the priest be sent for. I sighed to myself, told the nurse I would come, put the phone down and then lay there for a moment, asking the Lord why I was needed at that time of the morning! However, after a few minutes I got up, dressed and went to the hospital.

When I got there, I found the old lady was unconscious, but her husband was there, sitting quietly beside her. The nurse asked me if I wanted a cup of tea and I told her I would and while I sipped my tea I talked with the old lady’s husband - a lovely old man. He told me that his wife had been suffering from Alzheimer’s for the last few years and he also told me how he had been finding it more and more difficult to care for her at home by himself. His wife had had the stroke the afternoon before and been brought to the hospital, but there was not a lot the medical staff could do except make her comfortable, so after this was done and he told his two married children to go home, he just sat there with her - and, I think, began to realise that this was “goodbye” - his wife would not be going home with him any more. That was when he had asked the nurse to call me.

We sat together in the quiet of the night and he told me of their life together; of how they had married in Bolton and then come south many years ago, looking for work. He told me a little of his efforts to care for his wife as her Alzheimer’s progressed and I saw in his eyes a little of his fear at his not really being able to cope; I saw a little of the relief that must have come, when he realised that his wife’s stroke was going to relieve him of this burden; and I also saw a little of the sense of failure - and maybe even betrayal her - that he must have felt at that.

When we finished talking, I said to him, “Let’s anoint your wife and give her into the hands of the Lord” and we stood on either side of the bed as we began the prayers for the sacrament of the sick. When we came to the “laying on of hands” I asked him to lay his hands on his wife with me and together we asked silently for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Then, He held her hands as I anointed them and her forehead and together we gave her into the hands of the Lord.

We live in an age when increasingly people feel that “everything depends on me!” Our Christian faith, however, tells us something different. It tells us that we are in Covenant, in partnership. It tells us that things are given into our care for a time - but the time will come when we have to give them back, because our time has passed. Through prayer, the Spirit gives us the insight when it is time to take up the caring and when to lay it down, but it is never easy and we are never certain that we are right. The old man, sitting by his wife, knew that his time had come to hand his wife over into the care of the Lord and that he needed to say “Goodbye”. We know in our heart that it is so important to say “Goodbye” well - and has been my great privilege as a priest to help people do this. To say, “Goodbye” does not mean that love ends, but that it is fulfilled. We give back what we have been given so that the Lord can take it forward into.....what? - we can only hope for. So, maybe, it was not just coincidence that I was called to the hospital on the morning of Holy Thursday, just as we were about to begin the Easter Mysteries - for these Mysteries are the Mysteries of saying, “Goodbye” in hope.

God Bless,
Terry

My Sabbatical - 4th May 2006

This is coming very soon now, for I shall be leaving next month on 26th June. When I first thought about a sabbatical, I thought in terms of having a break, a time to rest and recoup - for these last five years have been rather stressful - and then coming back to Reading. I spoke to Bishop Crispian a couple of times about it and he was very supportive, telling me I would be welcome back in Reading, but, then, on the last occasion we spoke, he asked me if I really wanted to come back to Reading. He said that after nine years as University Chaplain at Oxford he had felt in need of a change and would quite understand if I also felt the same way. I must admit that his question frightened me. I so enjoy our community here - even if, or because, it changes so often - and I also enjoy my home; the first time I have ever had a home of my own - and I did not want to lose either, but our Tradition says that God also speaks through Superiors and slowly I had to admit that I think I have given all I have to give here at Reading and that it is time for a change. So, I shall not be coming back to Reading after my sabbatical.

I feel rather like St Peter must have felt just before he stepped out of the boat, at the Lord's invitation, onto the water. We priests are given a home to live in, but apart from a few personal objects, it is not ours and when we walk out we leave everything behind. So, I know I shall be walking out of the door with just a suitcase, but I do not know much else of what the future holds. I know I am going from here to Borneo to teach for two months and then I hope to go to Indonesia, to Bali, for a year to do some writing, providing I can get the necessary visas. I do not know where I am going to live when I get there; I shall have to look for somewhere when I arrive. I do not know whether the writing, which some of you have urged me to, will come to anything - but I will try. I am not even sure whether I can support myself - but I have taken a language qualification so I can support myself teaching English if need be. It is all very scary!

However, when I first came to Reading it was also scary. We began with only about 30 people at Mass - and there were even one or two who made it plain that they wished me elsewhere - but a wonderful community was brought to life by the Lord and it is the memory of that which gives me the courage to go. I took an oath as a Missionary - a word which means "one who is sent" - and I feel I am being sent, I feel the finger of the Lord moving me towards.....? I do not yet know. I don't want to leave you, but I need to go. I shall miss you all - and I hope you will miss me - but be happy for me and pray for me please.

God Bless,
Terry

To be a Missionary - 27th April 2006

Last Tuesday, I was at St Joseph's College, Mill Hill - the Motherhouse of the Mill Hill Missionaries and the place where I trained for the priesthood. We were saying a Mass of Farewell, because the College is going to be sold. Our school of theology has moved to East Africa and to India, which is where most of our present students come from and so St Joseph's is now much too large for our use.

During the Mass, we were invited to share memories of our time there. One priest said he would like to remember Paul, now dead, who was his classmate and who used to sit next to him when they were students - in fact in the exact spot where the speaker was then sitting. Another mentioned a rather dour, but very dedicated Professor, also now dead, who used to teach in the College. Another spoke of the Sisters who for years had looked after us. There were many memories, some funny, some sad, but all treasured - memories of friendships that were made and endured. I, for example, have met classmates of mine, whom I have not seen for over twenty years or more, but we still belong to each other, we are still friends, part of the fellowship formed at St Joseph's.

Pondering that sweetly sad day, I am coming to appreciate more and more that we were formed as missionaries by learning to become friends, by learning to live in fellowship with each other, and when we were "sent out" - which is what the word "missionary" means - we were sent to gather people into community, into fellowship. We were "sent out" to help create a band of friends.

When I first came to Reading as Chaplain, I was at a loss as how to work, for I had never worked in a University before. While trying to work out what was required of me, I slipped into "automatic pilot" and found myself "gathering" people into community. We began the Sunday evening Mass and I began standing at the door to welcome whoever came. We started coffee and tea after Mass and also Celebration Masses etc. I had a gut feeling that the Sunday Mass should be a place where people felt at home - what the Holy Spirit did when they gathered was his/her task, not mine - my task was to be a gatherer and make whoever came feel welcome, wanted and at home.

This is not the usual idea that people have of Missionaries. Many seem to think that we are sent out to indoctrinate - and maybe that is one of the reasons why missionary vocations in Western Europe and North America have now disappeared. The Missionary movement of the Church has moved south to Africa, Asia and Latin America - and this is true of all Missionaries Societies. These are now the areas where the missionary vocations are coming from. Maybe, because here in Western Europe and North America we no longer think of life in terms of community and fellowship - whereas in these places they still do. We think of society rather in terms of knowledge and the power knowledge gives - a technocratic society. We have almost lost the sense that knowledge and power should be at the service of the community - and so when we think of "missionaries" we do so in terms of knowledge and power - indoctrination - and not in terms of community and friendship. But, be that as it may, the Christian missionary task remains - to build community.

There are two ways in which you can build community. You can gather people together by making them hate or fear those outside the group, or you can gather them together by inspiring them to serve those outside the group. The former type of group is exclusive, the latter overlap, which is one way of telling which type of group you belong to - and this includes all groups - golf clubs as well as a Churches or political organisations.

I belong to many "groups". I belong to the Mill Hill Missionaries; I belong to the Catholic Chaplaincy community and the ecumenical Chaplaincy; I belong to Portsmouth diocese; I belong to the Catholic Church. Sometimes, we Catholics have acted as though the group ends there - at the boundaries of the Church. However, it is part of our doctrine that we may not identify the Church of God with the Roman Catholic Church. The Church goes far beyond Catholic and even Christian boundaries. This is why, when the Pope speaks officially, he also addresses his letters to "all men and women of good-will". An ancient hymn says, "Where there is love and charity - there is God". Fundamentally, the task of promoting love and friendship is Gospel, is to found the Church, in its widest sense. This is why missionaries open schools, hospitals clinics etc, wherever they go - not as ways of turning people into Catholics, but as ways of service - of creating community, creating friendship, making God present. In the Christian Tradition, it is Love which is all important - Knowledge comes second, as a reflection on what we are trying to do so that we may learn to love better. This is why, nowadays, Christianity is counter-cultural.

At the Chaplaincy Mass, we have people who are non-Catholic Christians and also people who are not Christians. Our task is to make them welcome not to indoctrinate them. Pope Paul VI said, "To be a Christian is to be a Missionary" and this we do this by making people feel welcome and at home. People, both Christians and others, tell me that they do feel at home and welcome in the Chaplaincy here at Reading. For this I am profoundly grateful and I realised on Tuesday that I learnt this in St Joseph's College, Mill Hill. I also realised that even when that building has gone, the friendship and fellowship to which, by God's grace it gave birth, will remain and flourish: flourish here at Reading, flourish wherever believers take it and flourish - as believers in the Resurrection we must affirm - even beyond death.

God Bless,
Terry

Waiting for Spring - 19th April 2006

Several years ago, I was on a plane from Singapore heading towards London. It had been a long trip - 18 hours in those days - and we were still about two hours out from London, when a small boy, of about four years in age, in the seat in front began to complain to his Mother. "When will we get there?" he whined with tiredness. "Soon", whispered his Mother, "not long now". "But I want to be there now!" complained the tired little boy. "We still have to wait a little", his Mother encouraged him, "But, whyyyyyyyyy?" wailed the small boy.

I was thinking about him this morning, as I walked along looking at the Spring flowers that have so miraculously appeared in the last few weeks. I was thinking about him, because during the very long winter through which we have just passed, I often felt like saying, "but I want the Spring to come now!" And had anyone said to me, "We still have to wait a little", I would have been tempted to wail, "But, whyyyyyyyyy?"

Where do the flowers go to in winter? Why do we have to go through those long, boring months of what seems like "un-life" in our gardens? Yet somehow we know that the plants need a time to withdraw into themselves and that in the darkness of their winter retreat something wonderful is happening, something is coming to be, something of which we have no knowledge until it bursts into life when it is ready.

That same "But, whyyyyyyyyy?" also resounds in our spiritual life at times - when we are faced with the revolt against our best instincts, which can rise up within our hearts; when we discover a brokenness within us that we never knew we had; when we find our road blocked by our own limitations. Throughout our lives, the world about us has told us that if we try hard enough we can do anything - and then we find we can't. Even the way in which we have understood our faith has so often led us to believe that when we face a moral challenge all we have to do is ask God's help and use our will-power and - hey presto! - the obstacle is overcome. But, then we find it is not so. We discover that there is a dimension of our lives over which will-power cannot work its magic. We discover that we cannot do the things we thought were our right and inheritance, and from our souls goes up the cry, "But, whyyyyyyyyy?"

When this happens, it is my time for being "two hours out from London"; the time for my winter. It is the time to draw deep into myself and discover who my God is and who I am. This is the Holy Saturday of my life, when I come to accept the death of those ambitions which I thought would make me so like others. In that surrender, my God leads me gently deep into myself, helping me to discover who I am - not called to be like others, but called to be "me". There, in the winter of my Holy Saturday, God is doing something wonderful, he is preparing me for Spring.

There are some things which come under the realm of will-power, but this is a much smaller realm than most of us think. But there are other things which do not fall under its sway: being two hours out of London is one of them; wanting the Spring to come in the middle of January is another; and wanting the coming-to-be of a "me" that I have created in my own imagination, is a third. The coming of my Spring, however, is the work of God; it is not subject to my will-power. It will come when I am ready; it will come, in this life, when the time of my Holy Saturday is over; and it will also come, I believe, when..... but then who knows when the first daffodil will flower?

God Bless,
Terry

Holy Week - 6th April 2006

Sabine and I have just come back from a Catholic Chaplains' Conference near St Albans. It was good to meet other Chaplains, both old friends and new, and the speakers were excellent. Yesterday, one of the speakers was the pro Vice Chancellor of Newcastle, I think, and she gave a talk on the ways we learn with particular reference to the idea that students learn when lecturers lecture. She was an excellent teacher and showed us how we learnt "the things we do well". She showed us how we learnt from "doing things", from interaction with one another and from personal approval from friends and teachers - and only in a much lesser way, than normally thought, from lectures or talks. I think she said that, in a lecture, the attention span of the average person is between 3 and 20 minutes - and, when you think that most lectures last an hour, that gives pause for thought! Maybe a sermon might just qualify if the preacher is good!

I sat thinking about this in terms of our Catholic celebrations - of Mass and, in particular, the Holy Week celebrations, which we will be beginning next week. I saw that they are designed to help draw us closer to the Lord and follow many of the guidelines spoken of by the Conference Speaker. These ceremonies are full of things that we "do". We carry palms in the procession on Sunday; take part in the washing of feet on Thursday; we kiss the cross on Friday; we carry lighted candles into the darkened Church on Saturday - we do these things and in the "doing" we can learn, in the deepest sense, who Our Lord is.

Our "coming together" and interaction in prayer, singing etc also plays a vital part in this. Our "being together" helps bind us, encourage us, affirm us in our daily attempts to walk with Christ as his friend and friends of each other. I noticed the same thing at the conference - just being together with colleagues is a great support and encouragement in our lives as Chaplains. The meeting, greeting and talking together were even more important than the talks we had. That helped me realise that the coming together for Mass etc and the being with each other is more important than what the priest says. When we gather together; when we turn to each other, at the kiss of peace, and smile and shake hands, great works of grace and the Spirit are going on under the surface. It makes me wonder how much more we would "taste the Lord's presence among us" if we gave a little more time at the end of Mass to talk to each other as well!

God Bless,
Terry

Playing darts - 30th March 2006

One of the things I used to enjoy, during my holidays from the seminary, was a game of darts with my friends. Friday night was darts' night and we would spend the evening in the local pub, playing amongst ourselves and with others who challenged us. I was an average player, but, as with everyone, on some nights, my darts flew to the exact spot I wanted. However, when this happened - and it did not happen very often - those around me would jest, "But that doesn't count - he has God on his side!"

My friends were jesting - but, I think, they were also half serious. Some people really do think that if we follow religion we get God on our side - and these ideas often come from us, from the way we talk. And it is true, that if we follow our religion from our heart, then we will find ourselves blessed. For instance, if I follow the Lord's words and try to make friends with those among whom I live, then I will discover that it is much more pleasant to live among friends than it is to live among enemies or those who are indifferent to me. Moreover, I will find that when I am in need, then help will come - but this will usually come from my friends, from the way of life I am leading, rather than from a direct intervention of the Lord.

The invitation held out to me by the Lord is an invitation to journey through life with him - to allow him to be part of my story - but it always remains my story. He will not take away the things which make me - "me"! I still have to live with my weaknesses and live up to the challenges that my life - of itself - brings. I am still be bounded by the limitations of who I am, where I come from and the strengths and weaknesses that make me who I am. What is being offered by the Lord is that he will be a companion who never leaves me; a companion who will share the challenges and adventures of my life. This "glory" offered by God is not the glory of a list of achievements, such as I put on my CV - but the glory of becoming "me". I am unique - or at the end of my life, by God's grace, I will be! I myself, in my person, am the project of my life: becoming the rich and wonderful person that meeting the challenges of my life can make me. I am my own unique story - but to have someone do things for me, even if that person be the Lord, would mean that the story of no longer mine.

To really live my story, to carry through that project of becoming truly unique, I need companions. I need you, with your esteem and friendship - but above all I need someone, who does not tell me what to do, but actually shares with me in the doing of it. I need someone who knows how to be really human, but also someone who can cross the divide between one person and another and really share my humanity. I need someone both human and divine - I need Christ. With Christ, I find the grace, the courage to live my life - its weaknesses as well as its strengths - with Christ, I find the inspiration to try and, sometimes, to really excel at what I can do if I try - and that, sometimes, includes winning at darts!

God Bless,
Terry

My Father - 22nd March 2006

My father spent over twenty years in the Royal Navy. He went in as a young man, during the hungry 1920s, when there was very little work, and was assigned to be a stoker, shovelling coal in the warships, a gruelling job. Such men were hard men; they survived on their wits - and my father was such a man! He used to tell us that people, both inside and outside the Church, made remarks to him about his going to Mass on Sundays. They used to say, "You, Dickie Burke, a man like you and you go to Mass?" He would answer them, "I go because I need to go. You holy people seem to manage without. I cannot."

One of the things, which has plagued the Church for as long as she has existed, is the temptation for some to think of themselves as holy - and therefore everyone else as sinners. Part of this comes from the way that Baptism is taught. So often it is taught that when we are baptised we become children of God and this process is understood as being completed in the ceremony of Baptism - but this is not so. The teaching is indeed that we are born in baptism, but we seem to overlook the fact that like all new-born babies we need to grow. As St Paul says:

From the beginning till now the entire creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth; and not only creation, but all of us who possess the first-fruits of the Spirit, we too groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to be set free. For we must be content to hope that we shall be saved - our salvation is not in sight, we should not have to be hoping for it if it were - but, as I say, we must hope to be saved since we are not saved yet - it is something we must wait for with patience. (Rom.8:22ff)

As a community, we are both holy and sinful. We are holy because the Holy Spirit is at work in us, moulding us into the likeness of Jesus, and we are sinful because his/her work is not yet complete - and will not be complete until the End of Times. When people join us, they are not joining a community of sinless people, they are joining a people who have their eyes on the star, but are often still lying in the mud; they are joining a people who hope and trust in God, trust that if we walk together, helping and encouraging each other - especially when we are weak - then one day we will reach our home together.

There can be no place among us for pointing to someone and implying that he or she does not really belong - or that they are a failure. In fact, a sense of failure is the only real entrance qualification, for it is only when we experience failure that we are ready to turn to the Lord for help. If we ourselves want to be welcomed and healed by our Lord, then we have to embrace all those who wish to join us - no matter as what stage of the road we estimate they are at. This is taught us in the *Our Father*:

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who sin against us.

There is a place in our family for anyone who wants to walk with us. We are a family in the process of being reconciled to God by being reconciled to one another; we are a band of friends, being drawn out of the chaos by the power of the Holy Spirit; we pray together not because we have arrived, but because we believe that together we will one day arrive. Sometimes I meet people who tell me they feel they do not belong any more because of what they have done - or not done. You do belong; this is your home and always will be as long as you want it. You have a special and reserved place among us. My own Father knew that - and he had never even studied theology!!

God Bless,
Terry

Faith Schools - 16th March 2006

Years ago, when I studied Logic, I came across the interesting idea that you can have a "wrong question". An example of such a question would be: "Have you stopped beating you wife yet?" (If you try to answer this with either "yes" or "no", you will understand why it is a wrong question.) Such questions make erroneous assumptions - in the above case: that you have been beating your wife.

I came across one such question this morning when I turned on my pc and read the yahoo news summary. It is holding a poll and the question is: "Are Faith Schools divisive?" This is a wrong question as wrong because it assumes that "Faith Schools" can be something irrespective of those who run them. In themselves, "Faith Schools" are not anything. The real question should be about the motive of those who run "Faith Schools" - what are they using them for? What attitudes are they promoting? And that question applies as much to "non-Faith Schools" as it does to "Faith Schools".

You can build up a community in two ways: you can focus it inwards by promoting indifference or hostility to those outside; or you can bind it together focussing it outwards in service and compassion to those outside the community. In the first, you use antipathy for the outside world to pull the community together and in the second you use the mutual support and friendship between the members to point the community outwards in service. Faith communities can be built up in either way - just as secular communities can also be built up in either way.

History shows us, that Christian communities have, at various times, been built up in both ways. Indeed, both attitudes can exist together in the one community - as a glance of our communities both religious and secular show. However, at the heart of our faith community - in baptism - there is an anointing with Chrism, which takes place just after a person has been baptised. Having been made with one Christ in the waters of baptism, we are anointed as priest (to make Christ present), prophet (to dare speak the truth), king (to have the courage to serve). We, as a Christian Community share this task with Christ - and this is our self-understanding. However, this three-fold vocation is not primarily for

our internal consumption - it is for the world, as the history of our Missions show - for our Mission schools and hospitals have never been limited to those of our Catholic community.

Our anointed vocation is to be a community at the service of the world - not closed against it. So, we need to ask of our Faith Schools, not whether they should exist, but what are we doing with them. Our commitment to He who is the Truth demands that we ask this question. However, it is a question which also needs to be asked of secular institutions, such as non-Faith Schools - for history shows us that Faith communities do not have a monopoly of indifference or hostility towards those of a differing opinion.

God Bless,
Terry

Repentance - 9th March 2006

One of the greatest shocks, I have ever had, was to be told that my Father had died. I was sitting having a belated Christmas dinner with a group of priests in the Far East, when a phone call came through for me from my local religious Superior and he told me the news. I was stunned! I went back and sat down again at the table and the other priests kindly offered their condolences and began to talk about my going home for the funeral.

I was not thinking properly because of the shock, but the idea of going home for the funeral did not seem possible. Air travel was still, at that time, the privilege of the rich and missionaries! - and we only went on leave once in four years or even less, because it was too expensive. Moreover, because communications were still fairly basic, no priest from my Mission had ever gone home for a funeral before, because, normally, by the time he would have heard about it, the person concerned would have already been buried. The same would have happened to me if I had been travelling, but, as it was, I was in the Capital and communications had improved so much that I heard about it the same day.

So, I sat there; my mind filled with the difficulties and great expense involved with going home as well as the precedent it would set, but, at the end of the meal, one of the priests said, "Let's ask the Bishop and see what he says". So, on the way back to my Mission, about ten miles away, we called in to see the Bishop. He was still awake - for it was night-time - and he came down immediately, full of sympathy, and said, "We will arrange a ticket home for you in the morning." All that was required was for me to make a decision to go. I decided to go and next morning found myself at the airport, where the Bishop's Secretary met me with the ticket.

It was not an easy journey home. It was full of memories and sadness and further complicated by being held up in Dubai because of fog and not being able to proceed onward until the next day. However, I am very glad that I went home. To be healed, you need to go home.

I was reminded of this, listening to last week's gospel, "Repent and believe the Good News!" Words we hear often at this time of Lent. I think that when most of us hear the word, "Repent!" we think it means that we have to stop doing bad things and start doing good. We think it means that we have to pull ourselves together and reform our lives - and that often seems just too complicated and difficult. In a way, that was my mistake when it was first suggested to me that I should go home for my Dad's funeral. I was thinking of how much it would cost - not that I had any money - and also of all the arrangements which would have to be made and how other people would have to take on my work etc. Left to myself, I would probably have not gone home because it all seemed so difficult. As it was, I was surrounded with a group of friends, who made all the arrangements and took on the tasks of looking after everything; all I had to do was make the decision to go. In the same way, when the Lord says, "Repent!" all I have to do is make the decision to go. The rest will be taken care of.

"Repentance" or "metanoia" is something given to me, not something I have to do. All that is required of me is to accept and tell the Lord that I would like to come home; I would like to share my living with him - for "coming home" is what "repentance" means. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of power, who, like my friends in Sarawak, will do all that is needed to put things into motion once I have made the decision - that I want to come home.

God Bless,
Terry

The Desert - 1st March 2006

My Aunt Mary, who died last May, was a very loving person. She had no children of her own, but mothered every child, big and small, who came into sight. I belong to a large extended family, but every niece and nephew and their children and their grandchildren all received Christmas cards, birthday cards and special day cards - and usually little gifts to accompany them. For as long as I can remember, Aunt Mary was always there - loving, helping, encouraging. However, my dearest memory of her was not of how strong in love she was, but of a time when she was weak - and let me love her. It was cancer that took Aunt Mary from us, but for a long time she fought it and we often wondered where she got the strength from. However, slowly it weakened her and eventually, a few months before she died, she went into a hospice for a week's respite care. At the end of the week, I received a phone call from the hospice saying that she was on her way home, so I had to rush the 30 miles to where she lived, because she lived alone and there was no one there to receive her. I arrived just as the ambulance reached there and so was able to walk her into the house. However, when she tried to climb the stairs to her bedroom she could not do it - she was too weak. I still remember how stricken

she looked for the ambulance men had already gone and she did not know what to do. So, I picked her up and carried her upstairs and put her to bed. That memory of her holding me in her weakness is the most precious I have. All her life she had loved others, but that one time she let me love her.

I was thinking of this at the Ashes' Mass tonight. For, like my Aunt Mary, we are used to thinking about the Lord as the strong one: the one who does the loving and the healing and the helping. However, on Ash Wednesday, we see him going into the desert, going into his weakness. Later, in Holy Week, we will hear him call out in the Garden, asking us to stay with him and support him in his fear and weakness. Lent is the time we can reach out and mystically share with him in his weakness. Our Lenten fasting, prayer and alms-giving are the ways we carry him in his weakness. Through these small acts we somehow "make up what is lacking in the suffering of Christ", as Scripture puts it.

Lovers everywhere share their joys, but also share their weaknesses. Christ so often is the one who reaches out to us - sharing our weakness, coming to us in our distress. Now, in Lent, as he enters the desert, it is our turn to reach out to him. This can become one of our most precious memories - when we help carry him, who has always carried us.

God Bless,
Terry

How much is it worth? - 23rd February 2006

When I was first ordained a priest I was appointed to Borneo. I knew that I would only be allowed to stay for ten years, because of immigration regulations - but for a young man "ten years" is a very long time! However, even things which are a "very long time" eventually come to an end and - thirteen years after I arrived - the time came to say "Goodbye". It was the saddest day of my life. Borneo had become my home: my friends were there, my work was there, my life was there - but I had to say goodbye and it felt like "a little dying". At a farewell party, just before I left, I found myself saying, "If I had known, before I came, how painful it would be to say goodbye to you all, I would still have come. The wonder and the joy of having known you and lived with you have been well worth the pain that I now feel."

C. S. Lewis in his book, "Shadowlands", spoke of this pain as being a part of love. It is "the other side of the coin". The wonder and joy of loving someone will always carry with it pain and not just when the time to say goodbye comes. When you love someone, you have to give things up for them; you have to give time to spend with them; you have to be willing to share things with them. All of this is "a little dying" - but the one who is loved is worth it.

Lent has also been described by some spiritual writers as "a little dying", but it is also a dying in the context of loving. During the rest of the year, the Lord walks beside us as friend, companion and guide. He is the one we can lean on, the one who carries us in time of trouble, the one who never fails us. However, in Lent, it is as though he stands before us and asks, "How much am I worth?"

The doctrines of our Faith speak of truths that we need in order to really live and one of those doctrines is, "Jesus Christ is true God and true man". He is true man and so we have to love him as a "true man"; love him in the same way we would love any other person. When we love, we give things up for the person - this is the meaning of the Lenten fasting. When we love, we give time to spend with that person - this is the meaning of Lenten prayer. When we love, we share things with that person - this is the meaning of Lenten alms-giving.

This "little dying" of Lent is not, or should not be, an empty ritual. Easter tells us that we have to die in order to live and Easter is present whenever I look on the face of one I love - or want to love. The face of Jesus in the desert is the face we see as we enter Lent. He has shown us - and shows us daily - how much we are worth to him. His unspoken question to us in Lent is: "How much am I worth?" and each must answer in his/her own way.

God Bless,
Terry

A smile - 16th February 2006

One of my most enduring memories from South Africa was not from this recent trip but the previous one. I was visiting a squatters' camp of about 23,000 people with Sister Georgina, whom we support and who has set up a care centre there. She took me to visit the sick with two of the nursing assistants she has trained. We came to a small tin shack and at the doorway stood two solemn, small children: a boy and a girl aged about 6 and 7. They did not smile nor greet us as Sister smiled at them and then went inside the hut. However, I stopped, said "Dumela" - "hello" - (about the only word I knew) and held out my hand to these small, unsmiling children. At first, they were rather nervous of this strange, big man standing in front of them, but when I continued to hold out my hand to them and repeated my greeting they began to giggle and then push each other forward to shake hands. I teased them a little more and gave them a sweet each and left them smiling as I went inside the shack. Inside, I realised why there were so solemn. The only two adults in their lives - so Sister told me - were their Mother and Grandmother, and both of them were lying on a bed - obviously dying of AIDS.

There are many such children in the camps and townships of South Africa and much of the money we give to Sister - and also Fathers Ephraim and Emmanuel - goes towards feeding these children - both while their families are still alive and afterwards when this terrible disease has stolen their them away. When that happens, Sister and the Fathers try to

find families to take the children - relatives, if possible, or good-hearted people who will take them in and make them part of their family - but they do not want to build orphanages.

On my visits this time, with Fathers Ephraim and Emmanuel, into the townships they look after I discovered that between them they have about 180 AIDS orphans. They get these children together once a month and give them a small dinner party and then give them their rations to take home to their adopted families. This enables to these children to feel that they are contributing to their new homes and also helps them feel somewhat special. These rations are provided partly by the township people and partly by the monies we and other send to help them. This is Gospel.

The word "Gospel" is the old English word for "Good News". This news is "good" not primarily because of theological statements about God and Jesus, but because it tells people they are special - they are liked and they are wanted. Jesus himself first reached out to people in friendship by curing them and feeding them and eating and drinking with them before he led them into deeper happiness. So, whenever we showing someone they are liked, they are special, the Gospel is preached. I saw the Gospel in the concern and gifts of money you gave me at Christmas for these children; I saw it in the work of Sister Georgina and Fathers Ephraim and Emmanuel and their helpers. I also saw the Gospel happening when I stopped outside that tin shack and smiled at those two small solemn children - for when the smiles came on the faces of those two small solemn children, I believe the Lord was giving them a little light in their darkness and a little hope - even though all they knew and loved were dying inside that hut.

God Bless,
Terry

To light a candle - 26th January 2006

One of my earliest memories is of being at Mass with my Mum and at the end of Mass going with her to "light a candle for Nan", my Grandmother, who had recently died. I remember my Mum showing me how to put the penny into the box, take a candle, kiss it, light it and put it on the stand and then kneel down and say a prayer for Nan. If you ask me, even now, what "lighting a candle" means, I would be hard put to adequately explain, but I know, and I knew then, that I was somehow reaching out and touching my Nan and..... - and that is when I run out of words.

In our Catholic branch of Christianity, we have many such symbols, which help bind us in prayer with one another and to the Lord. The central ones, of course, are the sacraments - Baptism, Eucharist etc. - the great signs through which God joins us in our living, but these sacraments also have "ripples" which spread to everything that we do. They show how we can use everything in this world to express our common life with God and by so doing confirm it as something we want.

One of the great advantages of symbols is that they are open to everyone - and not just those who are good at expressing themselves through words. When I go to say Mass in the prison I often talk about "the sign of the cross", which most of the lads will have seen people use at some time - such as a footballer taking a penalty or even a boxer beginning a bout. This is not superstition; the one who makes the sign of the cross is saying something like: "Lord, don't leave me alone with this - please be with me". These prisoners at Reading, all young men under 21, always surprise me by how intently they listen and seem to want to hear what I have to say. I noticed this also on the missions with people becoming Christians for the first time. A symbol like the sign of the cross is something people new to prayer can do - something they can use to enter the world of prayer - even if they cannot read, are not very clever with words, or are just shy of praying. Symbols like these are also wonderful for people like me who may be quite good with words but want to go beyond.....

Using signs and symbols, such as lighting a candle or making the sign of the cross etc. is like entering a door (intimations of Narnia!!) into a new and intimate way of being with the Lord and with others. It is a very rich way of being human for it is the way lovers speak to each other and how parents show their children they are loved. I always begin the day with the sign of the Cross and by so doing I not only ask the Lord to share my living that day, but I also confirm my belonging to my Catholic family - those who gave me this rich way of living and praying. By taking up their legacy of symbols I also reach out and join with those who have gone before. I touch them with love - including my Nan and also my Mum, who first taught me how to light a candle.

God Bless,
Terry

Life - 20th January 2006

Wednesday's newspaper carried an account of the funeral of Kath Horton, the Reading student who was killed in Thailand and on the opposite page was the story of the death penalty given to the two Thai fishermen who murdered and raped her. Kath's mother and sister had said that they wanted prison, not death for the two and this started me thinking about the finality of death.

In the account I read, it said that Kath had been used and abused and then tossed into the sea to die - as though she were not worth anything any more - and I found that the most shocking part of all. Can you ever say about anyone - let alone an innocent and abused girl - that they are not worth anything anymore?

There have been one or two times in my life, when I felt I was not worth anything. But someone always came, someone who believed in me, someone whose faith in me got me to my feet again and gave me the courage and ability to live once more - and this experience of being loved has led me to dare to believe in others. I have some wonderful memories of friendships born in Leper Hospitals, Mental Hospitals, Prisons, Old People's Homes - in the fringes of our society, to where we often push people - people considered not worth anything any more. I have discovered that if you want to see God at work, then smile and stretch out your hand in friendship to those whom nobody wants. God's power flows through our smiles and our fingers - it flows through our belief in people.

Mother Teresa was once asked why she rescued dying babies from the trash bins where they had been discarded, when she knew they would die very soon. She answered, "At least they will die knowing that someone loved them, someone believed in them - if only for a few minutes." To say of any living person, "Let them die because there is nothing more worth caring about" is radical Unbelief. It is a lie! For while there is life there is always the promise of goodness and worth - if only someone will believe in them. This is obviously true of the girl left to die by those two Thai fishermen, but it is also equally true of those same two Thai fishermen who have been sentenced to death.

God Bless,
Terry

On Friendship - 12th January 2006

I have just come back from a prayer service for Kath Horton, the Reading student who was murdered in Thailand. It was not a memorial service - that will come later when her memory is not so overshadowed by the dark events of her death. This was a time for her friends and colleagues to come together - to be quiet, to pray and to remember. So often, we only really come to appreciate our friendships when they are broken by death or by distance - and then we are struck by pain.

Being friends means being vulnerable for it means letting people in - putting yourself in a position where you can be hurt. This "being hurt" is the "other side of the coin", as C. S. Lewis puts it, part of the bargain of loving - and for most people is a price well worth paying for the privilege of loving someone.

This afternoon, at the short prayer service, as I watched Kath's friends and colleagues sit and remember her, I wondered if there was also among some a tinge of regret. When I mourn a friend I often also feel regret - a regret that I had not said the words I wanted to, a regret that I had not given a little more time, a regret that I had not realised just how much I loved him or her. How little time we usually give ourselves to sit down and appreciate that we are friends and lovers - and that we have friends and lovers. We allow ourselves to get so busy that we have no time to remember how wonderful it is to have them around - until death or separation comes and forces us to realise how much we miss them. As Lovers and friends we need to find time to reflect, time to appreciate those we love, time to decide to "make time" for our loved ones. Then when the time comes to pay the price of our love, the pain we will feel will be the pain of separation and loss - but not the pain of regret.

God Bless,
Terry

Black and White - 8th January 2006

Last week, when I was in Ireland, my nephew showed me some photographs he had taken, mostly of boats moored by the river. He had changed them into black and white because he thought they looked better that way and indeed the stark black and whiteness of the photos brought out patterns and shapes in a way that coloured pictures would not. In the gentler world of colours, there is so much more to look at - especially in Ireland which boasts of its "forty shades of green" - and these distract, somewhat from the stark contrast of water, boat and land. My nephew has an eye for art - and while his pictures are a work of art, it is also useful to remember that the real world is clothed in its forty shades of green!

Photography is not the only area where we put things into black and white in order to see something more clearly. The Lord, in his story about rich men, camels and the eye of a needle was putting his teaching into black and white so that we would not miss the point - but he also never let us forget that the world is in colour. We often do it with the pictures of Christianity we make for ourselves and while these pictures can help us, we need to remember that they are only pictures. I was reminded of this at Mass the other day where the response was: "All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God". Sometimes our black and white picture of what makes a Christian would mean that this passage from Scripture cannot be true - and indeed Epiphany was not in fact a giving of the Christ-child to all nations, but only to some!

We also use a black and white camera sometimes when we look at people. We click on something a person said or did - look at the black and white picture we arrive at and then condemn them - and in so doing block out the forty shades of green and many other colours, which colour other parts of their lives and thoughts. No wonder the Lord warned us, "Judge not, lest you be judged".

What has led me into these thoughts so early in the New Year? - Listening to one or two rather intolerant people who seem to see things in black and white. Where are these thoughts taking me? - First to have a look at my own

photograph album and see how many black and white pictures I have there. Second, to try to make a New Year resolution that when I am looking at something in black and white I shall remind myself that we live in a world full of colours and that forty shades of green are only the beginning of the beauty in our world - and in especially in people!

God Bless,
Terry

On Mothers and Siblings - 1st January 2006

I have just come back from three days in the west of Ireland with my nephew and his family. I enjoyed the visit enormously, especially meeting the newest member of the family - Ella, who is two. She is a real charmer, with a smile to melt your heart, but I also noticed that when she wanted something, she wanted it now! It is not often that I can watch a family from the inside, so to speak, but during those three days I watched how the family - and especially the mother - showed little Ella how loved she was, but at the same time showed her that there are limits to wanting and having. She was not corrected for everything, but there was always a small movement towards showing her that wanting and having is also about sharing - and share she did. I got offered an occasional sweet, a piece of Satsuma - and an occasional bit of half chewed bread!! Ella is learning to share, she is learning to love.

This Sunday, tomorrow, is the first day of the New Year and is the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God - truly the mother of Christ, our God and our human brother. It is no coincidence that this Feast is on the first day of the year. It shows us that we are a part of a real family. It shows us that we are all loved. It shows us that we are not made to live in a world of enemies but in a world of brothers and sisters, a world where wanting and having is also about sharing.

This Feast of our Mother Mary also shows us that God is our Mother and so we will be blessed this year with plenty of hugs, plenty of times when we will know we are loved. However, there will also times when we are shown that there are limits to our wanting and having. We will not be corrected for everything, but there will always be a small movement towards learning that wanting and having are about sharing.

So may this New Year be one where we will enjoy the hugs, enjoy knowing we are loved - and enjoy also learning to share - for that is the way we learn to love!

God Bless,
Terry

My Uncle John - 15th December 2005

A good few years ago, when I was still a sprog, as my Mother used to say, I passed my driving test. An aunt of mine found an old car for sale and my Mother paid ten pounds for it - I had almost no money as I was a seminarian. I was proud of this old, rather battered car, even though my brother and I often had to push start it, because it was rather cantankerous. It was the first car my family had ever had and the summer after I got it we all decided to travel in it to Cornwall for our summer holidays. My brother and I polished the car, we changed its oil, renewed all its spark plugs and the night before we were ready to go we decided to drive to the garage to fill it with petrol - but to our dismay we found it would not start. We pushed and pushed to bump start it, we checked and cleaned all the spark plugs again, but it resisted all our efforts - my brother and I were desolate!

My mother suggested that I ring her brother, my Uncle John, who worked in a car factory. I was a little hesitant because he lived in another part of London and we had not seen him for over a year and it seemed a little cheeky after all that time to ask for help. However, I phoned him and told him my problem and to my astonishment and delight he told me he would come over. He arrived in no time and in even less time he fixed the problem - I had mixed up the caps on the spark plugs! He and my aunt, who came with him, stayed on and we had a very enjoyable evening. In fact, it was a new beginning in our relationship with Uncle John. He became much closer friends and all because I was in trouble and I asked for help.

That, in a nutshell, is also the kernel of Christmas - or almost, for there is one difference. My Uncle John came because I was in trouble and he knew about that because I had asked for help. At Christmas, the Lord also came because I was in trouble, but he knew about the trouble long before I did and also long before I asked for help. He came and waited until I came to realise that I needed help and then waited even longer until I was ready to invite him in.

The whole of the Scriptures speaks of this courtesy of God. He suggests, he offers, but he will not, he cannot force his way in to help. His hands are tied by the utmost respect and reverence for us and if he has to wait outside and take shelter from the weather in a stable because I do not invite him into my home, then he will wait. Moreover, this does not happen just once, for the inviting can never be done once for all. The more I live the more I realise that I need him for this and for that - and above all, I realise more and more that I want him just to be there with me. I want him for him!

How do I invite him in? There is only one way and that is the same way as I invited my Uncle John. I have to speak to him, tell him the mess I am in and ask him to come. I may not tell him how to come nor what to do when he comes, just ask him to come - and he never fails me. But - I have to ask him, really ask him and there is only one way to do that and it is by telling someone that I am in need of help. When Christ came among us as a man, he committed

himself to humanity and will only come through humanity. So, I have to invite him through humanity - through another human being.

In our Catholic tradition, this is usually done through a priest, but it can also be done by being honest with w friend etc. However, I am not being truly honest if I only tell myself - it is our faith that God is found in relationships and "me and myself" is not a relationship. If I want the Word to come, then I must speak the word to another - and then the Mystery of Christmas happens all over again, except that this time he finds a home in my heart and life and not just in a stable.

God Bless,
Terry

Samy - 8th December 2005

Two years ago, I visited India to see the boys we support with our Christmas charity and I was taken around by Samy, a delightful guy, who had recently got married. Samy had been brought up in the hostel and was and is still very grateful and so when I visit, he ensures that I have transport of some sort - even though it is the back of a motor bike. Well, one day, I was out with Samy visiting one of the hostel graduates and we were running late, because we could not find where he lived. I was a little concerned because I knew that Samy's new wife, Vidya, was cooking him a meal, so I told him to turn back and we would try another day. Samy, however, insisted that we went on and so I said to him, "Vidya will be upset if you are late for your meal". Samy answered, with a cheeky grin, "But the making-up is so lovely, Father!"

Sometimes, newly married couples can see more clearly than the rest of us that "making-up", forgiving and being forgiven are all parts of love-making. They are indispensable ways in which we grow in friendship and understanding and often there is no other way to get there. We may have a selfishness deep in our heart, which can only be seen when it "comes out" and leaves us standing in need of forgiveness. Without coming out it will block our path to greater love - and we may never know what is causing that block, nor be able to overcome it, until it appears. I think that this is what my spiritual friend, Julian of Norwich, means when she says that "some sins are necessary, but all are used by the Lord for his purposes."

Little acts of selfishness appear in our lives quite often, but we usually give them a different name - "standing up for yourself", for example. Only when they come between us and someone we love have we a chance to recognise them for what they really are - and then use them to come to greater love by saying "sorry". This, I think, is particularly true of Christmas time. It is a time for gathering with family and friends, but I sometimes hear people say that they dread Christmas because of the arguments which so often happen. If all that I have said above is true, then that is right, for our failings will appear more readily when we are with those we love. But likewise so also does our chance to grow in love. So, if you should find yourself in a "clash" of some sort during Christmas, remember the wisdom of Samy, the street boy, "But the making-up is so lovely, Father".

God Bless,
Terry

Freud - 1st December 2005

Hello to you all,

I am teaching a course in Sexual Ethics in north London, at the moment, and any such course incorporates the insights of psychology to give a more balanced view and Tuesday last, we were looking at the insights of Sigmund Freud. Freud saw two basic drives in us: the sexual drive and the aggression drive. However, his concept of the sexual drive, while close to the theological idea, is far wider than most people understand it. He sees this drive as the power which can leads us into all forms of association and relationship - at the heart of which lies the rich friendship and love between husband and wife and family. However, he also sees that the only way we will succeed in forming these relationships is if we dare to "let our guard down", and become vulnerable, for no true friendship and intimacy can come about unless we dare to be vulnerable before the one we wish to love.

To do this, however, means that we may be hurt. To make yourself defenceless before someone means that can love you or abuse you - and this is frightening. It is in this context that Freud sees the drive to aggression - it is that part of us that tries to stop us being hurt. It is our self-defence mechanism and it is hard to get past this, especially if we have been hurt in the past. However, affective maturity means that we must grow towards trusting people, we must learn to be vulnerable - because this is the only way we can learn to love. This insight applies to all our relationships - including our relationship with God. Our life is - or should be - a journey out of aggression so into relationship.

Last night, I was talking with someone about the love God has for us and this guy said, "I often wonder if God is one day going to give up on me". I answered him that the only way he would ever know the answer to that is by asking God, "Do you love me?" "Try it!" I said, but I saw in his eyes a reluctance, for to ask such a question is to make yourself vulnerable - maybe God will say, "No!"

The fear of being hurt, the fear of being let down - Freud's "drive to aggression" - can so easily stop us asking that

question, but we need to know the answer if we are to dare to let God into our living and loving, if we are to become who we were made to be. Maybe, this time of the year, Advent, can help us in this. When our ancestors, the People of Israel, asked God, "Do you love us?", he answered by coming amongst them as a baby and you cannot get anything less threatening, more vulnerable than a baby!

Have you ever asked God, "Do you love me?"

God Bless,
Terry

Advent - 24th November 2005

Hello to you all,

I was born into a large extended family. I had 22 aunts and uncles (including marriage partners), several great aunts and uncles and many cousins. This made for a great sense of belonging and a great sense that you were not alone in your living. Uncle Harry was a carpenter, Uncle John was a car mechanic, my Mum played the piano, Aunt Mary was always there with a birthday card etc. All were there to help you in your living, to help you to be "you". Sometimes, in the course of growing up, you might come to admire one member of the family and so tend to imitate him/her for a while. However, that passes and because your family accepts you as you are, you dare to be who you are - to become who you are.

This sense of belonging was mirrored by being brought up in a Catholic family. From the earliest age, you began to realise that you were also surrounded by a heavenly group of aunts and uncles and cousins as well. You knew you were part of a family which stretched back in time and from this world to the next. These were the saints and angels, real people, who were also interested in you and ready to help. Besides your Guardian Angel, there was also St. Anthony - great when you lost something; St Jude for when you had given up hope; and, course, Our Lady, always ready to give you a hug! Sometimes you might be tempted to take one of these saints as a model of how to walk with the Lord, just as you also imitated a member of your family whom you admired. However, sooner or later you realise that each saint is different and each walked a different way with the Lord and that gives you the courage to walk your way with the Lord, to be who you are - to become who you are.

This Sunday, we come into Advent. It is the time of the Coming. It is the time to receive the Lord - and this must happen not just once but over and over again as we move and grow. This year you are different from the person you were last year. The family, with which God has surrounded you, both here and in the world to come, should have helped you become more "you". You may not think much of this "you", but it is this "you" whom the Lord wants; it is this "you" whom the Lord loves; it is this "you" to whom he is holding out his hand. All you need to do is let him love you as you are - just as your family do.

God Bless,
Terry

Winter Frost - 17th November 2005

Hello to you all,

Yesterday, I found myself with an hour or so to spare in the afternoon and I used it to bring in my potted plants from the garden into the small conservatory at the back of my house - and when I woke up this morning I realised that I had got them in just in time.

Some plants, like roses, can withstand the frost, they just slowly stop blooming as winter progresses and wait for the spring. Other plants, like brussel sprouts actually enjoy the frost and market gardeners say that unless sprout has been touched by frost there is no taste to them. But other plants again, like my geraniums, margueritas and begonias etc., cannot take the frost and if I leave them outside they will die. Some can take frost, some thrive on it, and some die from it - just like people.

I am reminded of a friend of mine who died some years ago. He once told me of a time in his life when he became involved with a married woman. As time passed, he realised that for both their sakes he needed to end the situation, but he did not have the courage to do so. Each time he saw her, he lost courage and lost the words he wanted to say. This, he said, sent his life into a downward spiral and he just did not know what to do.

He worked in London and went home at night on the Underground and always bought a newspaper to read. He told me that one night, he was not able to buy a newspaper, but he had in his pocket a book that a friend of his had asked him to get for him, so he took this out and began to read. It was a book about Pope Pius XII and contained a story about a man who had got himself into a very difficult situation. He asked the Pope what a person should do if he did not have the courage or strength to face up to a difficult situation. The Pope answered, "Run away!" For my friend, this "coincidence" showed him a way out. He ran away.

Is he to be condemned for cowardice? No, I don't think so. He is rather like my geraniums - he was one of those people who just could not take the frost - he had to run into the conservatory until the sun began to shine again. If he had stayed outside he would have died. I think we all have a bit of the rose, a bit of the brussel sprout and a bit of geranium in us; Wisdom - a Gift of the Spirit - is to be able to see which is which.

God Bless,
Terry

Sabbatical - 2nd November 2005

Hello to you all,

This time ten years ago, I was in India, working in a hostel for street children. We had 96 boys there and I learned the names of all of the lads and on one occasion introduced them all by name to a visitor - hesitating just once - and I am very proud of that. I have yet to get to that stage of learning names here at the Chaplaincy - but I try! I enjoyed that work immensely and when I was told that I would have to leave the hostel, because of difficulties with another member of the staff, I was devastated. I came back to U.K. not knowing what was going to happen or where I was going - but somehow felt that the Lord had his finger in the pie and was leading me.

A few months after returning, Bishop Crispian phoned me and asked me if I would become University Chaplain at Reading. At first I demurred. I knew nothing about Chaplaincy work and was not attracted to it at all, but a friend of mine added his voice to the Bishop's and so I said I would try. I felt like Peter stepping out of the boat on to the water at the Lord's invitation - I was very nervous, to say the least. There were a lot of difficulties at first, but they gradually settled and I discovered to my surprise that I enjoyed Chaplaincy work - and more important the members of the Chaplaincy seemed to enjoy having me here as Chaplain - and this has been very important to me.

This coming July, I shall have been here for at Reading ten years and I am feeling it, so I have asked for a year's sabbatical and my Superior at Mill Hill has granted it. I feel the need to let the Lord feed my inner man. I feel the need to have time to think, to pray, to do nothing and see what the Lord leads me to - and one of the things I think he is leading me to is to try my hand at writing.

I had a close friend in US, who is now dead, and she always used to urge me to write. Just before she died three years ago, she told a friend of mine to nag me until I started. Some of you have also urged me to try - and so I have decided to give myself the space and opportunity to do so.

I have not yet fully decided on where I am going, but I feel in me the call of the Far East - which was my first home as a priest - and if it works out I would like to go to Indonesia and learn the National language. This is very similar to the National language of Malaysia - where I teach in summer - and while I know a few words I have always wanted to learn more. I am thinking of Indonesia rather than Malaysia because so much English is spoken in Malaysia and I would be forced to use the language more in Indonesia. However, all this is still in the planning stage and I do not know if I will even be able to get a visa for Indonesia, but since first having had the thought, things have moved so swiftly that it feels like the finger of the Lord is in this.

Genesis tells us that God creates out of chaos and it is my experience that when the Lord moves his finger, things get chaotic. This is another way of saying: I am nervous. I don't mind the Lord directing me as long as I know what he is doing - but this never happens. I have to take his hand and let him lead me. It is rather like stepping out of the boat again at the invitation of the Lord and I remember that when Peter did that he sank! However, I place my trust in the fact that when that happened, the Lord grabbed him before he disappeared under the waves. If the Lord has brought me through the tempests I have experienced and into such wonderful places and such wonderful people as have been my family here at the Chaplaincy - then he is not going to let me sink out of sight - but I might get wet in the process!

God Bless,
Terry

Yoga - 27th October 2005

Hello to you all,

There are times when I get bullied! I was talking to a long-standing member of our community and telling her about aches and pains I have been getting and how the doctor has told me they are due to life-style and not disease. She then told me about some yoga exercises she does and started urging me to try them. I gave her all the reasons as to why it was difficult to set up a regime where I could get into the habit of doing such things - but she overrode them all and bullied me into trying.

She gave me a DVD showing the exercises and for the last week I have been trying "some" of them when I first get up in the morning before my morning prayer. Some of the exercises frighten me rather, some are beyond me, but some I can and do try to make a semblance of following - and I must admit that I am already noticing a difference. Gently stretching muscles which have not been stretched for years is doing something - not much, but something and it feels good. So sometimes bullying works!

After my exercises this morning, I read the passage appointed for today in the Divine Office. It was from the book of Wisdom, which speaks of Wisdom as if she were a person and says: "She gently finds her way into the hearts of holy ones, turning them into friends of God and prophets." (Wis.7:27) As I read it, I realised that there is an analogy between the way Wisdom finds its gentle way into our hearts, and the way suppleness is finding its way (slowly!) into my stretched muscles. In both - we have to do exercises!

The Mass shows us how to do these spiritual exercises. The Mass is not just about receiving Communion - that would

indicate that our role in the Christian life is passive. The Consecration can only take place because bread and wine has been offered - and offered by us. At the Offertory of the Mass, the bread and wine we give represent who we are - our body and blood - and we entrust these to God so that we may share the worship and life with Christ. At the Consecration, he becomes truly present, drawing us into his great act of worship and in Communion that oneness of our life with Christ is consummated.

However, just like in a marriage, the consummation does not happen all at once. The giving of ourselves has to be done over and over again. It is done formally at Mass, when we give ourselves together as a community to the Lord, but it also needs to be done every morning - the offertory of the Mass needs, in this way, to be made day by day. So, in the morning, when I throw my legs over the side of the bed, I pause and give the day to the Lord - asking him to share it with me. Like the yoga, it is a daily exercise which stretches my spirit and lets Wisdom gently find her way into my soul and life, just as the yoga is letting suppleness find its way gently into my oft-seeming atrophied joints!

God Bless,
Terry

Coincidences - 20th October 2005

Hello to you all,

I was quite young, in my very early teens, when I first became aware that I wanted become a priest. My family was Catholic, but there were no priests or nuns in my family, so I was very shy to tell anyone. On top of this, I had failed my 11 plus exam and when that happened one was considered not quite up to things intellectually; I believed this and thought it barred me from the priesthood. So, I told no one about these desires of mine, thinking they would go away; I left school at 16 and went out to work. However, the wanting did not go away; At times it even became quite painful, but I was much too "ashamed" - if that is the right word - to admit this wanting to anyone.

One day, in my later teens, I was walking along the road and feeling very down - for those frustrated desires of mine had reared their head again - and as I walked I saw my old Parish Priest drive up, get out of his car and pass me on his way into a house, probably on a sick call. I had known him all my life, but had never really chatted with him. However, I said, "Good morning, Father" and he answered, "Hello, Terry" and I walked on. Then I heard him call after me and I turned back and he said, "Terry, if you ever have thoughts about a vocation, you will come and see me, wont you?" He then turned and went into the house.

That for me was one of the spiritual highs of my life. A "chance" meeting; a word that just "happens" to slip out (I say that because my PP had no memory of that meeting when I spoke to him about it some years later); a "coincidence" that God used to give hope and courage to a boy who dared to dream. It opened up the future for me and a year or so later I did go and see him.

These spiritual highs in our lives are very important, even though they may not be very frequent. They are moments for us to treasure and look back to, for they contain the loving face of God, a face, which we may not be able to see at the moment of looking back. The Jewish people wrote down those great moments - such as the Passover - and this gave and still gives them courage to go on living as a people. Our own people, the Christians, also wrote such moments down in the Gospels, and these memories also carry us through difficult times. But all of us also have our own personal Gospels, moments when we saw or heard or were touched by the Lord and we need to write those down or at least remember them. We need to be able to look back and say, "That really happened, no matter what I feel now". The God who touched me then is the same God who is with me now - even if I cannot feel his presence so clearly. The one who cared for me then is the one who, out of love for me, still pulls the world together for my benefit - even if I do choose to call those happenings "coincidences"!

God Bless,
Terry

Saying your prayers - 13th October 2005

Hello to you all,

About a year ago, I chatted with a man about religion and spirituality. He told me that he was into spirituality but considered all religion to be hypocrisy. I asked him if he had read about the great spiritual traditions of Europe, such as Benedictine spirituality, or Franciscan or Carmelite. He responded by saying, "that is not spirituality; all they do is recite prayers."

I thought about this conversation last night, when talking with a friend of mine about the programme called "The Monastery" which was on television earlier in the year. In that programme, four guys went into the Benedictine Abbey at Worth for six weeks and followed the daily routine of the monks. They were fairly ordinary men, whom you might meet any day, but as they followed the monks in their way of life - sang the psalms five times a day, attended Mass and entered the periods of silent reflection, something began to happen. Issues which had been hidden began to come to the surface and if not resolved were at least faced and moved forward. It seems that by giving themselves to the meaning and movement in the psalms, they opened themselves to what Christians would recognise as the influence of the Holy Spirit, and this creative Spirit thus moved them towards wholeness.

There is a Catholic teaching about the Sacraments, a principle called *ex opere operato*. It means, for example, when I, as a priest, pour water over the head of someone seeking baptism and say the words, "I baptise you..." then the Holy Spirit acts and makes that person a Child of God and a member of the Church. This happening does not depend on my holiness nor the holiness of the person being baptised - it is the work of the Creator and Sanctifier moving through the words and actions. This principle teaches that spirituality is not me seeking God, but me opening myself so that God can find me.

This principle is not confined to the Sacraments, but is the way I come into friendship with others and with God. I have to learn language - invented and given me by others, so that I can be drawn into friendship with them and with God. When I turn round at Mass at the sign of peace and shake hands, the Spirit moves through that action and those words to draw us into friendship. When I say the prayer "Our Father", the Spirit uses my recitation to draw me closer to the Father and closer to my brothers and sisters. In other words, I do not perform actions and say prayers because I am a holy and spiritual man; I say the words and do the actions so that the creating Spirit can draw me into friendship with others and with God. As someone I heard recently put it: the prayers I say and the actions I perform are like railway tracks - once they are down then the Holy Spirit can move along them.

God Bless,
Terry

Questions to God - 6th October 2005

Hello to you all,

Some years ago, close friend of mine told me of the time he left school and went to work on a building site. He was the only Catholic there and the other guys used to tease him about being a Catholic and about Catholic beliefs. He said that on one occasion he thought about what they had said and admitted to himself, "that's a good point!" and that question was still in his mind when he went to Mass with his parents that Sunday. He admitted that he usually daydreamed his way through Sunday Mass, but on this day, something the priest said caught his intention and he discovered it was an answer to the objection his workmates had made.

The next week, other remarks, which he could not answer, were made by his work-mates and he made these into a question inside his head - and again an answer came during the Mass. He said that he "felt tingly" at the thought that God was actually talking to him, so he began to address the questions directly to the Lord - and again the questions were always answered - not necessarily at Mass, but often; not necessarily immediately, but always while the question was still pertinent. I was talking to him about this last night and we both said that we had moved beyond questions to God and now rather entrusted people and problems to the Lord. He does this formally and out loud, which interested me, and then waits for when, where and how the Lord will answer - and he always does.

Our Faith tells us that our relationship with the Lord is truly a "Covenant", a partnership, but we have to experience it as that. So often our prayers are a one-way affair - us telling God what we want him to do. A partnership needs to be two-way and should have times when we "lean on the Lord" for those aspects of our lives which are simply beyond our capabilities and wisdom. He relies on us - just look at the freedom he gives us each day - and we need to rely on him; not only because his wisdom is so much greater than ours, but most of all because we are partners, friends, in covenant with each other. However, for a true friendship to grow both sides must talk and both sides must listen. In my experience, the Lord always listens to me and answers - but I often forget to listen out for him.

God Bless,
Terry

Our Smiles - 29th September 2005

Hello to you all,

I have been sorting out pictures of my late Aunt Mary for a memorial card and it has been difficult, because she had the loveliest of smiles, but as soon as you put a camera in front of her and asked her to smile, it just didn't work - she posed for the camera instead of smiling at me! I finally found a nice picture of her, which I took with a digital camera. I was chatting with her and she did not realise that I was taking her photograph, so I managed to capture that wonderful smile of hers.

It is wonderful what a smile can do. It can turn a stranger into a friend; change the experience of "I wish I had not come" into "I am glad to be here"; it can change a cold and lonely place into a home where I know I am welcomed. I mean, of course, a real smile, and not the pose my sweet Aunt used to put on for the camera.

A true smile seems to open a person's soul and you see that you are wanted and welcome. It shows you where friendship can grow and trust can be placed and in this way it can also show you the face of God - the one who wants you and wants you to know you are welcome.

Fundamentally, the Gospel, the Good News, is a smile; it is the smile of God. I cannot imagine that the Lord frowned or was unsmiling when the people came to him, asking for a word of kindness, for a cure, for a moment's notice. When the Lord smiled, those people would have known, experienced, they were loved - and that is "Gospel". The accounts written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are one step back from that first encounter, a description of how the

evangelist experienced what happened. Our theology and Creeds are two steps back from that - a reflection on the Gospel. The first line of preaching, however, the cutting edge, is the smile which reveals God's love. Without that, the creeds do not work!

This week, Freshers' Week, we have a University and a town full of people who may be wondering why they came here; people who are in a strange and lonely place; people who are looking for, hoping to find a friend, a home. You can do wonderful things this week with your smile. You can preach the Gospel and this will transform this cold and lonely town of ours into a home.

God Bless,
Terry

The Seasons - 22nd September 2005

Hello to you all,

I wrote to a friend of mine and told him that since coming back to UK I seemed to be low on energy and enthusiasm. He was very concerned at this and wrote back to me, urging me to see a doctor. I am touched by his concern, but I notice that he seems to think - in company with many other people - that if you are not on tip top form then there is something wrong with you - and this is just not true.

There are rhythms in our living, times when we go up and times when we go down and both are necessary parts of life. Maybe we, who live in these more northern climes, should know this better than others. We are moving into autumn, the summer is over and with a shiver we know that winter is not too far away, but we also know that however much we dislike winter - and I am one of those - without the winter then the glorious carnival, which is spring, cannot come to be. The same is true of us humans!

There seems to be a mind-set among some people that demands that we must be happy all the time. This is also true of some when they speak of spirituality. Prayer is seen as something to "make us feel better", in the sense of getting rid of concerns, worries and pain. Prayer, however, is about living; it is about our rejoicing, but it is also about letting the Lord into those quiet, sometimes dark and often sad periods which are the autumns and winters of our lives. It is about inviting the Lord into that necessary silence of our winters, so that he may bring the new spring to its full potential. To lose the winter is also to lose the spring.

This same mindset - that we must be happy all the time - is also, it seems to me, at the roots of the drug culture we see around us. We turn to drugs when we want to feel good all the time, but the rhythms of life will not be defeated. We will eventually go down, despite the drugs, and we will have to take more and more, but this time not to feel good, but just to feel normal - and then we are in trouble.

It was only when I came back from the Far East to live again in Europe that I realised that I had missed the changing seasons while I lived abroad. I am now learning to appreciate the "quiet periods" of life - those times when I am not full of energy and enthusiasm - and I am also learning that I need to give myself permission to enjoy them - for like others I sometimes think that I have to be bouncy all the time.

God Bless,
Terry

The Kites of Bali - 15th September 2005

Hello to you all,

After my two months teaching in Sarawak, I went to Bali for ten days. It was lovely!! I read novels, chatted with friends and relaxed on the beach and as I relaxed I looked up and saw the kites of Bali flying high in the sky. There are always sea breezes in Bali, unlike Sarawak, and the people love flying these huge kites and as I lay there watching them I realised that through them I could see the wind - the wind that held them up, the wind which made them so majestic, the wind, which is normally invisible.

Just before I left for Sarawak, I received an e-mail from a lad in Tanzania, named Gerald, who asked if we could help him go to University. He told about himself and also the cost of the Uni fees - £500 - and said that he would manage his food etc as he had done up to now. I wrote back saying that our Christmas Charity money for this year had all been spent and I told him where it had gone. He answered thanking me for replying and saying that he was so glad that the children in India and S Africa were being helped. I was so impressed by this answer that I wrote again asking him who had given him my e-mail address and he named someone who had been a student here with us a year or so ago. I then wrote to her and she told me that Gerald was a great lad whose whole family had died. He was very good at school and longed to be able to go to University but he was poor, poor, poor - in fact he lived in the streets. On hearing this I asked Sabine whether we had any money left from last year and she told me that we had £800 from tax which had just come in - just enough money to send Gerald to school and give him something to live on. So.... that is what we have done.

In Bali, I received an e-mail from Gerald - he was flying higher than any kite. He is absolutely over the moon that we have given him his chance to fly. But was it us? Who prompted him to write? Who worked it so that we should have the right amount of money left in the account? Who touched this heart of mine to have compassion on the lad? We don't

see the God who does such things, but just as we can see the wind when the kites of Bali fly, so we can see our God of love at work when such things happen.

God Bless,
Terry