

"Flowers that Eden never knew"

Ten years ago, I worked in a hostel for street children in India. I did not stay there very long, but, it was long enough to make some lovely friendships among the boys we cared for; friendships which endure to this day. Each time I return to visit India, many of them come to see me and want to spend time telling me how they are doing and, in many cases, introducing me to their wives and children. There is one lad, in particular, by the name of Samy, who is always most welcoming. He now owns a small taxi firm and when I am there he always makes sure I have transport and if he can, he drives me himself. Just before my last visit, Samy got married and when I arrived it was with great pride he introduced me to his new wife, a lovely but rather shy girl, named Vidya. The Old Testament says that a newly married man should be dispensed from civic duties so that he can "give joy to his wife" and so I tried to make sure that I did not occupy too much of Samy's time – but Samy insisted that the boys had to be visited. I remember the end of one long day, which I had spent bouncing about on the back of Samy's motorbike, as we visited boys in remoter parts of the area. As evening came, I said to Samy that we should now finish and go home, but Samy wanted to make one more visit. Now, I knew that his wife was cooking something special for him that night, so I said to him, "No, Samy, you are very kind, but your wife is waiting for you. It is not fair to let her supper get cold." Samy, however, would not hear of it and insisted that we go on to the house of one more hostel "old boy". I then made one more effort to get him to go home. I said, "This is not fair on Vidya, Samy. She is your new wife and she will be angry with you." "Ah, but Father", Samy replied "the 'making-up' is so nice!"

The memory of this came to mind yesterday morning, when I was reading in my Breviary, an Easter poem by Edwin Muir called "*One foot in Eden*". The poem speaks of how we often look back to Eden, or some other ideal situation, as being the place where all was goodness and happiness, but that now we live in a world hurt and broken by sin and when we look at our world we are tempted to see only the things we have lost through sin. However, it then goes on to say that disfigured as our world is, it nevertheless "*bears flowers in Eden never known*". The grace of God takes the pain and betrayal that we sow in our lives our communities and our world and makes of them the occasion for flowers and fruits that could never have appeared in Paradise. There was, in Eden, no place for compassion, for hope, for pity - nor for forgiveness or reconciliation! The tender sweetness of the Father's welcome for the Prodigal son can only happen outside Eden.

A while ago, I was faced with a situation where I needed to say sorry to someone. When I thought of what I had to do, my mind dwelt only on the pain and the embarrassment of saying "sorry". However, when it happened it was very beautiful and it was "*a fruit that Eden never knew*."

Diary

I think I have found a house to live in when my sabbatical finishes in September. It is not a large house, just two bedrooms, but quite charming and it overlooks a terraced padi farm. In Borneo, the people harvest padi once a year, but here in Bali, because of the wonderful irrigation system, they have three harvests a year. So, I should become an expert on padi farming – but I don't think I will join in, for it looks like very, very hard work.

The Parish Priest here is a very kind man and tries to include me in things such as celebrations etc – when he remembers! However, he has a disconcerting habit of inviting me to concelebrate with him at Masses on special occasion, but then, as we walk into Church, he will turn to me and say, "Say something to the people!" Still, I suppose that it is better than being ignored!!

God bless,

Terry