

***“Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?” (Shakespeare)***

I am reading a novel in which a boy who is studying English Literature comes across the above love sonnet by Shakespeare – but, for him, it is just another thing he has to learn, until, that is, he falls in love and then this poem suddenly comes alive for him and these words help him express the greatest thing that has ever happened to him – his falling in love. However – for his classmates around him, who have not fallen in love, they remain just the words of a sonnet they have to learn for the English Literature class!

Two weeks ago, in the prison here in Bali, I gave the first part of baptism to a woman prisoner. This first part consists of welcoming the person into the Christian community and signing him or her with the sign of the cross and so as she stood at the door of our small church in the prison grounds, I asked her name and she told me, “Margarethe”, I then asked what she asked of God's Church and she answered, “Baptism”. I then instructed her about what it meant to ask for baptism. I know this instruction by heart and so I spoke them, rather than read them, adapting them slightly to fit the situation in which she was being admitted to the Christian Church. I told her that the only path to God was with and through the community and that here among us, she would learn to know God: through our faith, through our Scriptures and through our way of life. I told her that here among us she would be touched by God, be drawn into his love and so come to know him and love him in return. I then asked her if this was what she wanted. She answered, “Yes” and so, together with her sponsor, also one of the prisoners, I marked her forehead with the sign of the cross and led her into the church. As she followed me towards the altar, the prisoners applauded and reached out to her to shake hands and welcome her. When I reached the altar and turned round and watched her slow progress to the front; I saw tears running down her face and such a look in her eyes!

Each Sunday, we stand and profess our faith; we profess that we believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. If asked, we would, no doubt, assert that the Church is the Body of Christ and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, but such professions of faith are so often like those lines of the sonnet by Shakespeare. They remain at the level of words to be said and beliefs to be held until, that is, we are touched by that love which gives them life. We Catholics are very strong on professing the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, but as St Therese of Lisieux used to say, “Do you think Christ wants to come down on our altars day after day only to be locked up in a golden tabernacle?” He wants something infinitely more precious than that. He wants you!” As I turned at the altar and watched the prisoners reaching out to Margarethe with smiles and words of welcome and love, I glimpsed at what that doctrine of the Real Presence is pointing to. I watched Christ welcoming her home.

Religious truth often looks like any other type of truth, but it is not. Fundamentally, it is not a statement of fact, but an experience. To the casual onlooker at our small ceremony, the words I spoke would have been merely ritual words, but in the ears of Margarethe, those ritual words of welcome became a love poem and in the outstretched hands of the other prisoners she saw..... well, only she could tell you that!

**Diary**

Last Sunday at Mass, I told the congregation about the baptism ceremony that was going to take place in the prison last Tuesday and I asked if anyone would like to donate something so that we could give a packed lunch to those prisoners who came to the service. I asked this in my usual understated English way, but I

have decided that I need to change my way of talking, because I was given nothing – on that day, that is. The next day, I went to have lunch with an American/Filipina family - and their two twin boys, aged about 10, gave me money from their pocket-money towards the meal. However, the Parish priest heard about it and donated the food and so the boys' money went to provide a few extras.

However, it is not quite true that I was given nothing at Mass. At the end of Mass, an Australian woman said to me that she would like to give me a donation for the Church, to be used in whatever way I wanted. She then handed me a 10,000 rupiah note and I thanked her. She obviously thought that she was making a generous offering, but I don't think she had really got the hang of Indonesian money, for Rp 10,000 comes to 60p in sterling – or just over one dollar in USD. Never mind – it is the thought that counts!

God bless,

Terry