

# The source of our loving

Last weekend, I went to Sabah, the Malaysian state to the north of here, for the ordination as Bishop of a past student of mine, Julius Dusim. Eleven bishops, over sixty priests and hundreds of laity took part in what was a joyous and noisy occasion – massed choirs sang their hearts out and traditional gongs sounded as the offertory gifts were danced up to the altar. But, there were two moments of silence, during the ceremony, which spoke to me even more loudly than the gongs. The first was "the laying on of hands" by the ordaining bishop. This is the moment when a person actually becomes a bishop. He gets up, from where he has been lying prostrate before the altar during the litany of the saints, and in silence goes and kneels before the bishop, who then lays his hands on his head. It is a moment of great drama, made more so by the silence – even if this is nowadays broken by the clicking of the ubiquitous camera shutters. The second moment of silence came at the kiss of peace. This is when the other bishops come to greet the new bishop in friendship and Julius solemnly gave and received the kiss of peace, while "shalom" was sung by the choir. But when the singing finished and silence again filled the Cathedral, Julius went to where his father and family were sitting; he kissed his father and embraced his family members – and, as he did so, the silence was broken by a thunderous applause from the congregation, as they saluted his father and family.

These two moments, it seemed to me, the official and the personal, summed up what had taken place in the Cathedral – and, in a wider context, summed up what the Christian story is all about. The moment, when the hands of the bishop were placed on Julius' head, was the moment when the authority to be a bishop was given him. It was the moment, he was commissioned to care for his people – but the power to care for them, the ability to love them came not from the laying on of hands, but came through the love and care he himself had received throughout his living, beginning with the love of the family into which he was born. The applause of the people, I believe, recognised this and acknowledged the part the family had played and will still play in his vocation as bishop.

We can sometimes get so "religious" about our Christian faith that we miss what is actually happening to us and the world. There is a tendency to understand our faith solely in terms of the outwards forms we see – such as baptism and, in this case, the "laying on of hands" – and so we can miss seeing the underlying process of gentle transforming love that such signs are pointing to and seeking to affirm. The belief that God has come into our world in Christ is a belief that his healing, redeeming love comes to us through people. It is a belief that the means by which we are saved is the love of people, filled and enriched with the love of Christ, and this love begins in the family into which we are born. When we are loved for who we are and not for what we do, then we are empowered to become who we are. As St Irenaeus says, "The glory of God is when we become fully human" and it is human love, taken up by Christ, which enables that to be.

## Diary

I met many of my past students at the ordination, many of whom had become priests but also some who had left to follow a vocation of marriage and family. Some of them, I had not met for years and I was touched by the affection with which they greeted me. It brought to mind the promise of the Lord that if we give up family for the sake of the Kingdom then we shall receive a hundredfold – in this world too.

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I am coming towards the end of my teaching in Sarawak and in about ten days time I will be heading home to Bali, but my heart is sinking at the thought. This is not because I do not want to be with my community in Bali – I do and am looking forward to that very much – but I have a growing fear that I am not going to have a home to go back to. My house in Bali is being renovated and although the contractor assured me that it would be completed long before I returned, the stories I am hearing about progress on the house suggest that it will be far from being ready. This is particularly worrying because my brother, his wife, and also my ex-housekeeper from UK, are coming to visit me in the middle of next month – and I will have not house to welcome them to. Am I mad about that? I'm furious! And maybe that is why the contractor does not answer the messages I send him.

So, just like last year, when I first arrived in Bali, I shall have to go house-hunting when I arrive to find somewhere to live and also to welcome my family to, when they arrive. Your prayers, please!

God bless,

Terry

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