

# Take your medicine

I suffer from gout, so when I first arrived in Bali, I checked in with a local doctor, who suggested a blood test. When the results came back, he told me they were good, but added that I must carry on using my medicine, "*for these conditions cannot be cured; only controlled.*" This started me thinking about the change there has been, in my lifetime, in the way we think about sickness and medicine. When I was a lad, sickness was understood in terms of symptoms, not the underlying cause, and so medicine was something you took to cure the pain - not to prevent it from happening. My Father suffered from stomach ulcers and when a pain attack came, one of us children would be sent to the pharmacy for a pain-killer. It did not occur to us that one day there might be a medicine which would stop the pain happening in the first place.

This is also true in the area of mental sickness. When I was a lad, those who suffered from mental sickness were quietly taken away to a mental hospital, where things like shock therapy were applied and, if this did not work, then they were locked away for the rest of their lives. I still remember my surprise, when I first met people, who had "*an incurable mental condition*", but who took medicine to keep the symptoms in check – a great blessing for those who suffer from mental illness.

However, there is still one area of life where this new attitude to medicine has not yet penetrated – and that is spirituality. We do not usually think of sin as sickness, but nevertheless we use the confessional as medicine to take away the pain of guilt after we have had a "sin attack"! So, we ought to begin thinking about what causes sin.

We do not "*just happen to sin*"; we do it because deep down inside us something is wrong – just as a gout attack happens when my body has too much uric acid. Nowadays, I deal with my gout by taking medicine, which slows down the production of uric acid – and so I rarely suffer from gout. But how do we deal with the wrong conditions which bring about "sin attacks"?

The people of Bali, among whom I live, are a gentle, peace-loving people and also very religious. Each day, in accordance with Hindu Tradition, they can be seen making offerings to God, asking for a blessing on all who enter their houses, travel their streets and meet them on the way. There is, I believe, a real connection between their Tradition and their gentleness. To bless someone day after day affects your attitude towards them and brings a blessing on you as well as the person blessed. This is why the Lord urges us, in the Gospel, "*Bless those who curse you*", for when we bless someone, the Holy Spirit moves through us on to that person and in this "*passing*" we are also healed.

When I first had a gout attack, I went to the doctor looking for something to cure the pain and he gave me something far better – something that would prevent the pain coming in the first place. I now try to do the same with sin. I stand before God in truth and dare to look at what causes the sin – my envy, selfishness, dislike etc. I, then, take my medicine – I bless all those towards whom I have such feelings – and it is remarkable how, like gout, it stops the pain.

## Diary

One of the difficulties of being "a large gentleman", here in the Far East, is trying to get a shirt that fits. The shops just do not cater for guys my size, so I have to go to a tailor and have one made. But herein lies a problem. The tailors, I have been to, want to measure the shirt I am wearing and copy that and even though I tell them not to do so because it does not me properly - but they do not seem to hear what I

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am saying. I am losing count of the number of shirts I have had made which do not fit – they do not realise that we men who are blessed in our size, stick out in places that slim, lithe Asians do not. In other words, they do not know to make a shirt for a man with "a belly" and so they cut the front of the shirt to the same length as the back and when I try it on it sticks out in front like the prow of a ship.

However, here in Kuching, I have found a tailor who has managed to make a shirt that fits. He did so because he asked me to come back for a for a fitting before it was finished. He then took a ruler and measured the distance from bottom of the shirt to the ground – and did so front back and sides. How simple - but such a difficult thing to communicate to the other tailors I have used. (I think that maybe I have the makings of a sermon in that experience!) The upshot is, that I now have a model for a shirt that fits and so, should I go to another tailor, I can just give them the shirt and say, "copy that!"

I have just a few days more before I to go back to my community in Bali. I have enjoyed my time here in Sarawak immensely, but now I want to go home. However, my diary here is full – as usually happens at the end of my stays here. I am booked for a meal each evening until I leave and I am also booked for talks almost every day as well. This is very gratifying – but also rather tiring – and, this morning, I have been sitting down with some people here in Kuching, working out plans for a series of audio talks. But I think this will have to wait until I come back again in June, as I have classes and exams to get through before I leave on Thursday. Always at the last minute – but this time it is not only my fault.

Do I have a house in Bali to stay in when I get there? Don't know yet – but together, the Lord and I can handle anything.

God bless,

Terry

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Terry Burke mhm, ma, stl,  
Jl Baliku 1, 12x,  
Br. Peliatan,  
Kerobokan, Kuta,  
Badung 80361  
Bali,  
Indonesia

Telephone:  
(62) 0361 738 898  
(62) 081558693301 (Indonesia)  
(60) 0168070676 (Malaysia)