

The road to Emmaus

Last week, a friend of mine in UK wrote to me in response to something I had written about the Conference on Global Warming, which has been taking place here in Bali during the past week. He asked whether I had an ethical slant on the efforts that are being urged on us, because, he said, he felt rather despondent about the whole thing. This was not so much about the problems that the UN Conference faced, but because of the sheer enormity of the problem. He wrote that, while he was trying to “do his bit”, he often doubted its effectiveness, for, he added, even if the whole of the UK went green, any improvement in the overall situation would be more than wiped out by the increase in CO2 emissions in China. Put like that, it does rather beg the question of whether our efforts are worth anything, for this is not even like David trying to fight Goliath; it is more like an ant trying to do so. There is the temptation to say, “this is completely beyond me, so, why don’t I just give up and go home?”

Last Sunday, we had a special Mass, here in Bali, to pray for the success of the UN Conference and the gospel chosen was “the road to Emmaus”. You will remember the story – after the Crucifixion, two of the disciples were on their way to Emmaus, when Jesus came up and walked along with them, although they did not recognise who it was. He asked them what they were talking about and they began to pour out their hearts to him - telling him of the dreams they had had, but had no more; of the hopes of changing the world they had cherished, but hopes that had been crushed, when Jesus died. The gospel does not actually say so, but my reading of it is, that they had given up - and the road to Emmaus was their road home.

Jesus then began to turn their thoughts – and feelings - upside down. The Scriptures, he explained, show that the Kingdom is God’s work, not theirs and will be brought about according to God’s wisdom, not theirs and, as he spoke, the gospel says, their hearts began “to burn within them” – they wanted to be friends with this man and so they asked him to stay for supper with them. In the course of the meal, in the “breaking of bread”, they recognised who he was and they also recognised that he was not excluding them from the work of the Kingdom, but taking from their shoulders the burden of responsibility for it. In the breaking of the bread, they realised that the Lord was asking for their friendship and that whatever they could do, give or say, no matter how small, would be gratefully accepted as a real contribution to the Kingdom - but without the fear of failing, for the work the Lord’s – not theirs.

Does this mean that we need not bother because God will get it done anyway? No, because friends do “bother”. Moreover, as Helder Camara, the late Bishop of Rio de Janeiro, said, “*The only power that God has, is the power of love in the human heart*”. He needs us, and even our weaknesses and failures he will use for the Kingdom. All he asks is that we hold on to him in friendship, no matter what, for, at the end of the day, that which holds the Kingdom together is friendship and that which is the reward of the Kingdom is also friendship. It was this friendship of the Lord that touched the hearts of those two disciples and made them turn back on the road and return to Jerusalem – and who would have dared prophecy the influence that decision would have on the world as we know it today. It was of God, so it happened and is happening – as is the turning off of an electric light when we are not using it.

Diary

So, the UN Conference has come to an end and Bali can get back to normal, for there have been policemen and soldiers stationed all along the roads, where the delegates travelled. A thought – this conference was called in an effort to cut down on greenhouse gas emissions, but each time a delegate moved from one place to another – even if only to go to the shops – he/she was accompanied by police-cars and outriders, all pumping greenhouse gas into the air! As they say in the North of England, “There’s nowt so queer as folk!” (Translation: Nothing so strange as people!)

The road to Emmaus

I am back staying in the guesthouse of a family here in Bali, as I was told to leave the lodgings I was in – not that I was throwing raucous parties, but because someone else had been booked in. There is a silver lining, however: it is a lovely place to be grumpy in!

The Chaplaincy choir, here in Bali, has produced a CD of Christmas carols and songs, which they are selling to raise money for orphans and the elderly. We had a great day out at the safari park, yesterday, with the children from one of the orphanages. There was a slight problem with the meal, however, for the children were shy to eat up all the meat which appeared on the table. This was because, Sister Scholastica told me, they were only used to having a small piece of chicken at one time. After the meal there were games and we gave them some small Christmas presents and it was touching to see them holding on tightly to these presents as they waved “Goodbye”. Now, we need to raise some money for school fees for them, for Sister tells me that the Government grant is never enough.

Thank you for the help you sent for Gerald in Tanzania. That is now oversubscribed, but he will need a little extra money at the end of his course as he begins to look for work, and that is now provided for.

God bless,

Terry