

Do you know how to eat this?

When, as a young man, I first arrived in Malaysia, there were many strange sayings I had to learn to understand. One of which was, “*Do you know how to eat this?*” – Often asked when I was being offered something to eat - and I used to think, “*What an odd thing to say! Of course I know how to eat it – you put it in your mouth and chew!*” I later discovered that what was being actually asked was, “Do you like to eat this?”, or, as I now prefer to understand it, “Do you know how to appreciate this?” The question implies – and rightly so – that if I do not like a certain food or drink, then the lack lies in me and not in the food. We have to learn to appreciate things!

I have found this understanding very helpful in many ways, for it allows me to say what I like or dislike, in the way of food, music, books etc, without condemning those things I dislike and, more importantly, without condemning those, who have a different appreciation from me. It is so easy to dismiss others, who hold a different opinion to me, who like different things from me or who worship in a different way to me – and that includes those who profess to have no beliefs at all, for we all worship something – namely, that which is most important in our life, for this becomes the standard by which we judge the value of all people and things. Worship does not mean bowing down in prayer, although it can be expressed in that way.

I think that when I was a younger man, the Roman Catholic Faith was the most important thing in my life and I tended to judge everyone and everything according to what I understood of that Faith. However, my living of good times and of bad has shifted my focus away from the Faith, which I still hold dear, to the God who is being revealed to me through that Faith – and I am coming to see that he is far greater and more involved in life than the teaching of doctrine manages to convey. Although, looking back, I realise that theology tells us this, but I had not yet learnt how to eat that truth.

I am discovering that God understands where I am in my life and how I got here – because I chose the things I knew how to eat, often at the expense of tastier things I had yet to learn to appreciate. I am also discovering that He leads me on in my journey – by slowly opening my eyes and my heart to those tastier experiences. From him, there is no bullying or condemnation to force me on my way, only the gentle journeying with me, teaching me to learn to eat new things.

When I first came to Malaysia, there was another Father Burke there, an old Jesuit priest in Kuala Lumpur. I heard many stories about how he reached out to people in their need, but the way he did so, often horrified some of his brother clergy, due to the cavalier way in which he broke canon law and accustomed ways of doing things. I only met him once, in 1972, but I still remember part of our conversation. He said to me, “At my time of life, there is only one thing that really matters – and that is compassion”. At the time, I had not yet really met that Compassionate God, whom he had come to know, I had to wait until I myself was in need of compassion, but I am coming to know him more and more and I am discovering that he has such understanding of the mess in which I so often find myself, because he is a God who knows how to eat everything.

BICC Newsletter

New Year’s Day is coming and all the scheduled Masses will be in Bahasa. However, if anyone is interested we could schedule a Mass in English, asking for blessings on the New Year. We could hold it in the upstairs chapel in Betania. Please let me know, if you would be interested and what time would be most suitable.

Bible Study/Discussion group

This should be on Tuesday at 6.15pm, but, as that is New Year’s Day, I wonder whether we should postpone it till the following Tuesday. Please let me know - those of you who attend. We are dealing with the teaching on sexuality in the Bible, which is rather different from how we normally regard rights and wrongs in sexuality.

Thursday Meditation Mass

This is on Thursdays at 6.30pm in the upstairs chapel at Betania. It is aimed at helping us listen to the Scriptures from our heart rather than our head. It is a very pleasant and relaxed way to pray. You are welcome to try it once to see if it suits you.

If anyone would like to chat with me – or go to confession – please feel free to call me and we can make an appointment. Being Chaplain, means I am here precisely for that.

Diary

Do you know how to eat this?

Christmas was wet, wet, wet and windy. One of the lovely things about Bali is that you can live partly outdoor all the time – until the rains come and then you don't quite know where to take shelter! I went out for Christmas day dinner with some friends and it rained and rained. I had to park my hired car some distance from the restaurant and walk through rain and ankle deep water both to and from the meal. I think that turned a heavy cold I had into bronchitis – so my doctor has put me on a course of antibiotics.

Christmas Mass was lovely – with our own choir and short Nativity play. We had over a thousand people in the Church for the English “Midnight Mass” at 6pm, and there were also some sitting in front of the Church following the proceedings on video screen. The later 10pm “Midnight Mass” in Indonesian had about 2000 people. I spoke to some of the people after Mass; many had come to Bali for the Christmas and New Year, from all over Indonesia and beyond. After Mass, we had a lovely Christmas Eve meal with my host family and a lot of people from the Church came too. With an earlier time for “Midnight Mass”, Christmas Eve seems to becoming a real part of the Feast, rather than just a day of preparation.

After the Mass, a reporter from a local paper stopped me as I was leaving to ask about the Mass – he had obviously seen me on the video screen. His English was not very good, so we tried a mixture of English and Indonesian and he asked me what was “the theme of this great celebration” (his words, not mine) and I told him that we were celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. To my surprise this seemed new to him. A little primary evangelisation is needed, I feel!!

My house is moving, slowly but moving and the new architect has some nice ideas for improving things, such as the window in the bathroom and the position of the toilets etc, to which I have agreed. However, when I go and see what was done, being undone in order to bring in the new improvements, my heart calls out, “Wrong way, wrong way; we are going backwards”!

May I wish you all God's blessings and guidance in the year ahead. May it be for you, truly a Year of Grace.

God bless,

Terry