

## And, what of me?

Yesterday, I had a funeral Mass. A holiday-maker from Malaysia had dropped dead and his family had come from Malaysia to bury him. He was 41 years old, still young by today's standards, and as I was preparing the Mass and wondering about what to say to his family, I was reminded of another, more shocking, premature death some years ago.

When I was teaching at the Mill Hill seminary, in London, there were two students, friends. One of them left the seminary, but the other went on to become a priest. He was appointed to mission in northern Uganda, where he worked, for three or four years, preaching the Gospel and helping to raise the living standards of the people – but then, one day, he was gunned down by bandits. He was in his 30s. When that happened, I phoned his friend, who had left the seminary and told him about the priest's death and was surprised by his response, "Dammit", he said, "he's already completed the work God gave him to do and here am I still trying to discover what he wants of me!"

He did not mean, of course, that God wanted the lad to be killed; he was giving voice to a basic Catholic belief that no life is ever wasted – even though it may appear so in our eyes. It is the conviction that just as God has given everyone different fingerprints, and a different DNA, so also he has given each person a different task in this world; we each have a unique contribution to make - and only that we can make it.

When we look at people, we tend to see sameness. We compare one with another and then grade them – good, better, best, or more often, bad, worse, worst – and then we often dismiss them as being unimportant. God, however, sees difference, uniqueness and he will not allow it to be lost. He has destined humanity to become something like a beautiful, stained glass window – each small piece of glass contributing to the magnificence of the whole and each piece vital – and this great picture will not be incomplete.

But, surely, you may ask, I have free will, so what if I refuse to cooperate? Or, what if I miss my opportunity, because I do not understand what is being asked of me? When I look back on my own life and cringe at some of the foolish and wrong things I have done, I am able, nevertheless, to see a little how God has taken them and used them to bring about a greater good and because of this, I find myself in the strange position of being grateful for having done the things, which still make me cringe. And even though I cannot see all God's work, I have come to believe that what he did with some of the messed up parts of my life, he will do with all – and that is what I understand by the doctrine of redemption. I think that in religion we sometimes get fixated by what happened on Calvary two thousand years ago and become purblind to that same redeeming Calvary love, which is sometimes seen in our lives, our times and our world. The great Artist is still creating the great Picture.

This belief that I am unique, I am wanted, I am free is what I understand by "the Good News" or "the Gospel". No matter how much I may mess up, the final judgement will always be that it was worthwhile that I was born – even though I may not see it at the moment. However, it is even more true that if I dare place myself into the hands of God, to be guided, the more glorious will my contribution be. Either way, God will not allow my uniqueness to be frustrated. I may not be faithful, but God always is.

So, I found I could say to that mourning family that although it may seem that their brother's life was tragically shortened, he will, nevertheless, have done what God sent him into the world to do. I have also decided that the next time I meet the murdered priest's friend, I will say to him, "You may

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still be looking for what God wants you to do in this world, but you may actually have already done it, - or at least part of it. And the same applies to me – and to you.

### Diary

The week just past, saw one of the great Feasts of Balinese Hinduism called Galungan – the victory of good over evil. It is rather like Easter, except that they celebrate it twice a year instead of once. The guys working on the windows of my house are Balinese and so they took a week off to celebrate the Feast. For this reason, I have kept away from the house all week, so that my “never-ending story” would not irritate me more than it usually does.

A few years ago, a friend of mine who used to study at Reading University, set up a website for my blogs etc. He still maintains it and adds the new blog each week. I told someone about it this week and I was gently chided, for not telling people about it. So, please consider yourself told:

[www.fatherterryburke.com](http://www.fatherterryburke.com)

God bless,

Terry