

And you shall renew the face of the earth

When I lived in England, these months of April and May, were always my favourite time of the year. From October to April, winter has its hold on the land: the trees stand lonely, lifeless and bereft of leaves and the bushes, especially the rose, present their ugly face to the world. I remember one rose bush, where I sometimes said Mass. It was an old rose bush and over the years, its long straggly branches had been trained along the wall outside the small room where I vested for Mass. I used to look at it through the long months and short days of winter and spring, while waiting for Mass to begin, but it had very little to commend it. It had green leaves of a dark and uninviting shade – and not very many of those – but the thing I noticed most were the thorns - sharp, long, dangerous-looking thorns. It was not a plant you would be tempted to touch or caress.

However, as spring advanced, small shoots of new, fresh, hopeful leaves would begin to appear - but I would not really notice them, because I had got so used to looking at the thorns and ugly leaves. And then, one day, usually in April, I would look out of the window and see that ugly old rose bush transformed - covered in the most wonderful, big, pink roses. I would stand in awe at the transformation that a little bit of sun and rain could bring about – and even though I knew it would happen, it always caught me by surprise.

I have been noticing recently that my attitude to people can be the same as my attitude to that old rose. I get so used to looking at the thorns that I forget that I am also a believer in the Spirit of the sun and rain, a believer in the Holy Spirit. The Lord said, “I will send you another Helper, the Spirit of Truth” (*Jn 14:15*), but so often I forget that the truth is given to me so that I can be a helper, not a destroyer – for truth can be used in either way.

Many of us were taught that we must never tell a lie, but we were not taught why! So, there are times, when, in the name of upholding truth, we wreak the most awful damage on others. We forget that truth and goodness are twins. Goodness needs truth in order to grow, but truth also needs goodness to show it which way to go. Had I just concentrated on the thorns of that old rose, I would probably have had it cut down in the name of safety - because people could be hurt and injured by those vicious thorns. Fortunately for the rose, I was also a believer in the Spirit, who renews the face of the earth, and so the rose was fed and watered instead of being cut down. How I wish I would believe in the same way when it comes to people!

Diary

Well, last Thursday was moving day, and up to Wednesday afternoon the overseer at the house insisted it would be so, but then I realised that while I could move in, the bottom of the house would still be occupied by the workers. So, tomorrow is now the day to go. Will I get in tomorrow? Watch this space!

Last night, I went to say Mass for a family, who were celebrating the 27th anniversary of “the family”, but it was not the wedding of the parents and I found it difficult to understand, when they tried to explain it to me. I asked how many people would be there and was told over 50 – all of whom belonged to this family. I asked more questions and gradually began to understand what was going on.

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These people originally came from another island, Flores – a very Catholic island – and, in 1981, those in Bali, who were descended from four brothers, the grandparents of the founding cousins, decided to gather together to celebrate their being “family” - “*Wuamesa*”, or “great home”, as they named themselves, and the gathering I was invited to was 27th anniversary of this original gathering.

They organised the occasion very well. It centred on the Mass, as most were Catholics, even though there were a few Muslims and Hindu family members there. They prayed for all who had died, and asked a blessing asked on all who had been born during the previous year. Then, after the Mass, the members of the family, who had attained their majority and were now considered “Elders” of the *Wuamesa* were brought to the front and congratulated. After which, there was a big meal and a concert. It was great fun – and, I thought, what an excellent idea for giving a sense of belonging to those, who lived in the anonymity of a big city.

God bless,

Terry