

The courage to be

Before coming to Bali, I worked as Chaplain at Reading University, where there were many overseas students and, when Christmastime came round, some of them felt quite lonely. So, one year, I decided to host a Christmas Day dinner, at the Catholic Chaplaincy, for anyone, who had nowhere else to go, and this was appreciated so much that it became a tradition. We usually had between 15 and 20 people sitting down to eat on Christmas Day and although I always co-opted some into helping with the cooking and table preparations etc, it always meant a lot of work for me. I would celebrate Midnight Mass and then another morning Mass in the next door parish and after that I would come home to begin the preparations for the dinner. Besides the cooking preparations, there were chairs, plates and cutlery etc to be carried from the house, where I lived, to the Chaplaincy on the other side of the road. And while there were always people to help do the carrying, I was the only one who knew where things were and so it was usually easier for me to do it myself. Then, after the meal, everything had to be tidied up and all these things had to be transported back again across the road. I would usually drop into my bed, about midnight, exhausted.

As I moved towards my 60s, my energy began to flag a little and I was tempted not to host a Christmas Day dinner, but that would have meant a lot of lonely people on Christmas Day. So, as Christmas drew near, I found the energy to take a deep breath and begin the preparations once more – and I was able to do so, because there was someone there, each year, who shared the planning and the work of the day. Her name was Margaret. She was not part of the University, but regularly came to the Chaplaincy Mass on Sunday evenings and so was part of our community. She knew how the Christmas meal went and also provided many of the things needed – especially the things she knew I would forget. She brought from her home decorations to make the table beautiful and other things to help people enjoy the meal and the Day. She did all this quite quietly, without any fuss, and it was her supportive and encouraging presence that, each year, gave me the courage to host one more Christmas dinner.

I am reminded of Margaret today, the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of the Lord, because this is the day on which she died. But, it is not just the day, which brings her to mind, but also what we are celebrating today. The Eucharist points to Christ's promise "to be with us always", and that is why the Catholic tradition insists that Christ is "really" present in the Eucharist. But this is only half the meaning of the "Real Presence"; St Therese of Lisieux says, "He doesn't come down upon our altars, day after day, just to be locked up in a golden tabernacle. He wants something far better. He wants our hearts, he wants to live in us". He wants to be "really" present in me – not as a memory, not as an inspiration, but as a real person, for only a real person, beside me as a friend and companion, can give me the courage to be. The teaching of the Real Presence is also about how he saves and redeems me - he does it by "being with me always".

However, this love of the Lord in the Eucharist needs to flow over from me on to others and one of the things I had to learn, as both Christian and priest, was to be Eucharist for others. When I was first ordained, I thought of my task as pointing out the path to be taken, but now I see more and more that it is not to teach, but to journey with people, as they try to follow where the Holy Spirit is leading. Fundamentally, they need me not to teach them, but to believe in them, just as the Lord believes in me and thereby gives me the courage to be. So, Margaret was Eucharist to me and thus enabled those

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students, who had nowhere else to go at Christmas, to find a home and a welcome at our Christmas dinners.

Diary

This Sunday, we will celebrate the First Holy Communion of some ex-Pat children of the Parish. It will be the first time this has happened and this was possible because we have four dedicated Filipina teachers, who run the program. However, being the first time, we are still trying to iron out kinks. Last Sunday, we held the First Confessions and we discovered one lad had not been baptised yet and then I was told that one girl was missing. So I sought her out during the week so that she could be ready for her First Communion – only to be told by her Mum that she had already made her First Communion and had also been coming to confession to me during the past year. I am reminded of the words of Jesus, quoting the Prophet Isaiah – “they have eyes, but they do not see!”

I have been working hard at preparing the course on Bio-ethics, which I shall be teaching next month in Kuching, Sarawak, and been using the speech recognition programme. I speak into the microphone and the computer writes it into my notes. However, the computer is learning all the time and you are supposed to correct it when it goes wrong – you block out the word and say it again until the computer gets it right. However, when I am thinking, I have a habit of sniffing, which the computer has interpreted as “if” and I have not found out how to tell the computer that this is a sniff and not a word. So, if I sit thinking for a while, I find my text reading “if if if if if”! These mistakes are added to by a strong breeze, which sometimes blows through my open windows, caressing the microphone and this starts the computer trying to interpret the sound. If I am called away and forget to pause the program, my text becomes gobbleddegook. I suppose that I shall just have to read the instructions!

The Catholic Mafia has been at work again and two people read my blog about dishwasher powder and brought me some back from Australian and Singapore respectively. So, with glee I set to, to show my housekeeper how to use the machine – only to have it stop on the middle of the wash-cycle. The technician was called and told me that a mouse had been nibbling at the inside, while it was waiting for washing powder, and now the machine has to go to the shop for repair.

BICC News

Sunday will be the First Holy Communion for some of the ex-Pat children in our community. So, the Mass will be slightly different and a little longer, as we try to make the day special for the children and their parents – and also us. These children belong to us as well as to their own families – that is what the Eucharist teaches.

Farewell to Michael, Sophie, Christine and Sabrina

This was one of the first families to help me feel at home, when I arrived here in Bali, and since then Michael has been very supportive and helpful in so many ways. They are now moving to China, where Michael will be taking up a new position in hotel management. We shall miss you all very much; you will leave a gap in our community. But thank you so much for having been among

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us and contributing so much, while you were here. Wherever you go, may the Lord go with you and bless you in your new home.

Bible Study/Discussion group

This is at 6.15pm on Tuesdays in the SFX committee room under the Church. We are studying St Luke's Gospel, but this will be the last session before I go to Sarawak to teach for six weeks.

Meditation Mass

This is at 6.30pm on Thursdays in the upstairs chapel in Betania. However, this also will be the last one before I leave for Sarawak on 3rd June.

Confession

If anyone wants to go to confession in English, I am always at the Church on Sundays from about 5.15pm and can hear your confession then. You are also welcome to call or email to fix another time.

God bless,

Terry