

Being willing to try...

A memory has come back to me during the past week - of the time, many years ago, when I was asked to help look after the neighbouring parish in Sarawak, because the Parish Priest had died. I would set out on a Friday evening, travel 25kms, in an old bus, which bounced its way along a sandy road until we reached the next river and then take a “chug-chug” launch upriver for two hours to get to the parish – I would stay there for the weekend, saying two Masses, one in the church and one in a kampong and then travel back to my own mission on the Monday. I was young, 29 years old, with time on my hands and had a passion for fixing things up – but almost no money to do it with. On one of these visits, my gaze alighted on the rather grubby shrine of Our Lady in front of the Church, which was glassed in on three sides and had a piece of clear plastic bag tacked on the fourth side. So, I took the statue, washed it, painted it and measured the side without glass, so I could buy a piece for the next time I came. A few days later, I was carrying the newly bought glass back to my house, when a 15 year old Catholic lad, by the name of Wilbert, came up and offered to carry it for me. I knew Wilbert quite well and as we walked along chatting, I told him about the shrine and he asked if he could come through with me the next weekend and help me fix it up and I gladly accepted his offer.

Early the following Saturday we set off and it took both of us to keep the glass safe on the bumpy bus journey, but finally we got it to the parish just before lunch. We ate in the bazaar and afterwards I went for short a siesta, while Wilbert said that he would begin getting things ready. When I woke up, I found a sorrowful lad waiting for me. While I was asleep, he had decided to try to fix the glass in by himself and in the course of doing so had broken it – it was not shattered, but lay in two pieces. I grumbled and complained, saying that he should have waited for me - and the memory that came back to me during this past week was of Wilbert standing there with tears gently rolling down his cheeks.

I was puzzled at first as to why this memory had suddenly surfaced, for it was while I was meditating on the passage from St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans *“Nothing can come between us and the love of Christ” (8:35)*. I had been thinking that this was true when trouble came from without, but, I was pondering, was this also true, when trouble came from within? There are times when my spirit seems to revolt against the Lord and goes its own way. Does not this, I wondered, come between me and the love of Christ? Can his love still reach me if I have chosen to go in another direction? It was then that this memory re-surfaced and I remembered, for the first time in years, the look on that tear-stained face – a look with which Wilbert condemned himself far more than my grumbling did.

It is strange how divided is the life we lead here on earth; we gain wisdom in one part of our lives, but we do not apply that insight to others areas. For instance, it would never occur to us to give our computer to a carpenter to be mended. Nor would we call in an electrician, if we had a pain in our back. We know that there are some things a person can do and others that he cannot. We do not expect everyone to have all skills – but we do not remember this, when we think about the spiritual life – and especially our own spiritual life. Wilbert knew what he wanted to do, but he did not have the skill to do it, and I blamed him for this – but worse, he blamed himself. Likewise, in our spiritual lives, we know what we should do – not be grumpy, for

Being willing to try...

example! - but we often do not know how to do it. And then we blame ourselves and live in a shame, which can stultify our lives, because it hides from us the affection with which God regards us.

But spirituality and morality are about loving – and loving is as much a skill to be learnt as mending computers and doctoring. We so focus on the particular thing we want to achieve in our loving that we forget that there are many other things also involved; things, which sometimes are more important than that which we are trying to achieve. For example, all that I could see, those many years ago, was a neat clean shrine, glassed in on four sides – what I was not looking at was that a young man happily gave up his weekend in order to be with me and help me in what I was doing. That, I now see, was a far more precious gift than a refurbished shrine for the parish church.

But, if this is just a lack of skill, how come so many years later my grumpiness seems to have got worse, rather than better – to say nothing of the other faults and failures that I keep under cover? Should these not be disappearing as I grow in wisdom and grace? But some skills are never acquired; some skills are gained and then slowly lost again. The skill is of secondary importance; It is the willingness to try, even though I fail again and again, that really matters. If all I had wanted was a perfect shrine, I could have hired a skilled man from the bazaar, who would have come and gone and I would never have seen him again. Instead, I had Wilbert, who remained a close friend – despite my grumbling – for many years afterwards, until, over time, contact with him was lost. I know now which of the two I most treasure.

I have been trying to remember how that episode with the broken glass ended. I would like to think that when I saw the tears I went and put my arm round him and told him it was ok. But I can't remember. I do so hope that I did, because one day, when I myself come before the Lord, with tears on my cheeks, I hope that he will come and put an arm round me.

Diary

I have discovered that I am not the only one who has a new house; some animal – I think a rat – has also taken up residence here. I have not heard it often, just twice in the middle of the night, when it seemed to be dancing a witches' Sabbath over the ceiling of my bedroom. However, I did not investigate it closely, because it sounded as though it might be a touch large!

I also have a water leak somewhere in the house. The water pump continually switches on for very short periods, every 30 seconds and I can see no signs of water coming out anywhere in or around the house. A friend from the Church has said that he will send someone along to investigate, for which I am grateful. It is not so much the loss of water that concerns me (what a very un-ecological thought!) but the noise from the pump every 30 seconds.

I have also discovered that a new 'betting facility' has opened very close to my house – a cock-fighting booth - and every afternoon, between 3 and 6pm, hordes of motorbikes make their way past my house, round the bottom of the garden and follow a dirt path into the trees, where the cock-fighting sessions take place. The

Being willing to try...

noise is very loud, but looking at the dirt path I think it will get rather muddy when the rains come – so it the noise will be in seasonal only, I hope.

I have been asked to teach, part time, at the local seminary here in Bali. This is a junior seminary, together with the Preparatory year for the Major seminary in Java. I will go along next week to see the Rector, who is a friend of mine, as see how we start.

God bless,

Terry