

WHY? Reflection 12 – Mother Mary (9/6/08 Independence day)

I have been back just one week now and am about to go back into the classroom after some ten years absence to teach some Mathematics and Computer Studies. Frank and Carl are also joining the staff at our little School here in Hilongos called St Teresa so it's a team effort. This is challenging enough for us but the real excitement for me is my first Religious Education Class coming up this Tuesday. (Monday is Independence Day) How do they approach things like Value Education here in the Philippines and how do the boys and girls take to being taught by an Australian for the first time in their lives let alone a Religious Brother. All teaching is done in English, which is a relief, but we will need a little Cebuano to help them follow what it is we are trying to say. Our accent will cause a little mirth, but please God they will get over this quickly enough.

My first lesson is going to be on Mary the Mother of God and there are many reasons why I am doing this. Not the least of which is the fact that she is very important to the lives of the local people here and a week does not go by when we seem to be celebrating Mary under one title or another. The rosary is said every day in the church and can be heard over the loud speakers all over town. I am interested to learn if it is just a grownup's devotion or if it is deeply imbedded in the hearts of the young too. There are, it seems to me, hundreds of titles given to her and each Barangay and indeed each town has their favourite Momma Mary. I have just finished reading the book called "The Song of three Sheppards" a truly delightful read, which is of course the story of Fatima written by James Hardiman, a non Catholic no less. It also got me thinking about writing this short reflection, so I hope something here touches you.

The children here love story telling so I plan to briefly tell the stories of three favourites of mine Fatima, Lourdes and Medjugorje. Our Lady has not been idle and really I believe she is present here in the Philippines in a very special way also. My memory of the Lourdes and Medjugorje visits (I was blessed in being able to go to both these places twice) are still quite fresh in my mind after so many years have passed. Yes I did witness a miracle or two and have told these stories many times to those willing to hear them with mixed reactions from my listeners. I have yet to go to Fatima and it has been my dream that one day I will go, if it is God's will.

Mary appeared to three peasant children who were tending their Parents sheep near the Cova da Iria in Portugal some 90 years ago and the town of Fatima has never been the same since. Today it still draws thousands of Pilgrims from around the World each year to

honour the Mother of God and we might ask why? The Fatima story has always gripped me and the prophecies are still being fulfilled today. Mary tried so hard to tell the World, through those three children, what needed to be done for peace to reign and for souls to be saved. Pray and do penance were her call and yet the world was so slow to listen. Why? "Tell the people to stop offending my Son" A very simple request really yet why do we not sit up and take notice? Thousands of people who were there on that day did sit up and take notice. The miracle experienced on October 19th 1917 is well documented and the many miracles that followed, though not so well known, help us realise that Mary did mean what she said and **we** were also expected to sit up and take notice. Mary appeared in France some years earlier to a young girl called Bernadette and the message was the same. Now it appears that Mary also may have appeared to more children in Yugoslavia in a place called Medjugorje in our own time frame and the message was the same again. This appearance has not been sanctioned by the Church however. The question I now ask myself is will she need to come again and where this time? One thing I do know is the message will not have changed.

Mary has a very special place in the hearts of all Christian Brothers and many brothers have become famous for their devotion to her yet I would guess there are still one or two doubters among us. I heard one brother say "I don't believe in the importance of places like Lourdes or Fatima in the overall scheme of things" what he meant I am not sure but it did cause me to wonder why he would say such a thing? I happen to believe that the message of Fatima is very important to the overall scheme of things. Some of the brothers, who taught me, such as Brother Bernadine Thomas, had a great love for Mary and passed it on to us and I will be ever thankful to men such as he for they gave us a very precious gift indeed. We know our own congregational history and it gave great importance to Mary under the title of "Our Lady of Perpetual Succour" and we have Mary to thank for our very survival all those years ago. Well I believe it's time again for us to **Pray** to her not only for our survival but also for her continued protection over the whole Edmund Rice Family which I suspect is very important to her.

My last thought is to ask you to think of the thousands of children who have been educated by the Christian Brothers since 1802 when Edmund Rice first started teaching in that classroom above the stable in Waterford and then think of those same children who were also introduced to Jesus' Mother and taught how to pray during the daily religious lesson. Now you will start to see why I believe Our Lady would take more than a small interest in our congregation. It is no wonder we have her as our special patron. In

Cebuano the title of "*Anahan sa Kanunayng Pasmabang*", which translates as Our Lady of Perpetual Help, is a favourite with the Filipino people too. Till next time-Peter T from Hilongos