

## ***Philippine Reflections 8 – Joyful Attitude to life, Filipino Style***

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A stands for Attitude. I am referring to a positive attitude of course. I am constantly insisting on the need for it in my teaching strategies. The interesting thing is I have discovered that third world countries seem to have this quality in abundance despite their poor standard of living. I noticed it in the Nairobi slums in Kenya and believe me their conditions were appalling and I have noticed it also here in the poor parts of the Philippines.

\*Have you ever heard of the Chinese proverb ***“He who has one chop stick goes hungry”***? Well the obvious corollary to this is if you have two you will survive. **Faith** and **Good works** are needed to enter God’s Kingdom. Having only one of these won’t do it, so the good book says. Saint Paul also suggested that faith without good works is dead. The Filipino people have a strong faith, there is no doubt about that and despite their obvious poverty they are so willing to share what they have; it is quite humbling.

The Filipino people are starting to take hold of me and not just me but Frank and Carl too. This is allowing me to start enjoying the whole Filipino experience in a way I had never expected. The way people interact with each other and the way foreigners are so readily welcomed and the local people’s genuine openness has been marvellous. I heard that The Philippines has the fourth happiest people in the world. It would be interesting to see where Australia finds itself on this happiness scale. I would like to know why these people seem so contented and happy when there is good reason to be otherwise. They have a wonderful happy disposition which shines through everything they do. Now the mystery to me is that poverty is such a huge problem here and corruption on every level of society in endemic proportions that people should, I would have thought, have plenty to be angry about.

At this stage I would like to quote an email message from Bobby Motus that came to me just recently and it is so typical of the Filipinos that I have to add it here. ***“Trials keep us strong. Sorrows keep us human. Failure keeps us humble. Success keeps us glowing but only faith and attitude keep us going.”*** And ***“Let us stop telling God how big our storm is but instead let us tell our storm how big God is”*** I have read the history of this Nation as well as studied their language and I would say they have experienced every aspect of this quote and probably a lot more. The Spanish and American influence could have so easily left them bitter not to mention the way the Japanese treated them during World War Two. So maybe it is in their strong faith and unswerving loyalty to their country that one can find the answer to the big “A”.

We are interacting with the locals on many levels and just by walking down the street we get the chance to capture the Filipino spirit face to face. One is unable to avoid stopping and answering the greetings and questions of all you meet both young and old. Yes the children are so pleased to see you and their smiles win you in an instant. ***“Hi Joe”*** has gradually been replaced with ***“Hi Brother”*** and Carl has literally been swept off his feet and spends a lot of his **walking for exercise** time talking and laughing with the children who are so delighted to have someone who is so willing to just stop and share the time of day. I also am interacting with the children every day but the adults are also wonderful and I have been invited into many a home in the short time I have been here. I was told the eyes are the window to the soul and maybe I understand a little better what that means now. At first

there is a little shyness (Ulaw) but this soon falls away and their trust and their generosity just gifts you with a lovely God experience.

*“Unless you become like little children you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven”* The innocence of these children is quite tangible and would melt the hardest of hearts. We have been here in Hilongos exactly six months now and I would say we are still in the honeymoon period. The hospitality of the people has been nothing short of amazing. Flowers, food and small household items continue to be presented to us and we are able to share the food we get with the poor because we have more than we need. We have been taking food out into the streets finding very poor families all around us. This has allowed us to get to know many families and sad to say some of the dwellings are very poor indeed. Most of these dwellings are setting on stilts which is just as well as the tide flows in under the houses every day. The smell is just awful. Some photos of these houses (Not sure that’s an accurate description as a word like hovel would fit better) can be seen in Diary 16. *“Blessed are the poor”* is hard to read when you see these people yet they seem so happy and joyful. The question I ask - is there something stronger and deeper going on in the hearts and minds of these people?

In the Gospel of John a couple of days ago, Jesus told us why He came into the world: ***“That we might have life and enjoy it to the full.”*** Today’s reading repeats the same message, first negatively ***“He did not come to condemn the world”*** then positively ***“but to save it”*** This is of course the very essence of the ***good news*** and I would say the basic core of their strong faith. If the Filipino Catholics believe this with all their hearts and all their minds then yes they do have a great deal to be happy about.

Now here is the conundrum and I hope I make this point clear because it is not so clear to my head right now. Where does ***“The people power”*** fit in to the picture? Filipinos have not just sat by accepting the injustices and corruption about them. They have certainly not sat around idly waiting for God to save them or give them a better deal. Every now and then in their history the people have risen up and challenged the Government of the day, and in every case the Church has been along side the people. This power actually overthrows governments. I guess most people would know how President Marcos and then later President Estrada were forced to step down. So in all this outward manifestation of joy there is a fierce clinging to justice and fair play and the belief that they have the power to change things if they need changing. Even today the present administration is under pressure to improve its image and get its act together and once again the Church, which after all is made up of people, has an important role to play and is expected to be out in front.

I finish this reflection with a famous quote: ***“The Essence of courage is to be able to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never to be content with a half truth when the whole truth can be won. Endow us with the courage that is born of loyalty to all that is noble and worthy, that scorns to compromise with vice and injustice and knows no fear when truth and right are in jeopardy.”*** I believe it is the God given gift of courage that wins the day for the Filipino people. They are a faithful joyous but above all a courageous people and they have a lot to teach us. I now think I understand a little better why they are able to be such generous, happy and above all loving neighbours to all. *\*They certainly have two chop sticks and not just one so they will survive and more than that they will prosper.*

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