

REFLECTION 13 – FOOTPRINT and Life Style - Hilongos

Our life style is certainly very different to those living in Australia but I must hasten to add that there are many brothers choosing to live simply while living in an affluent society also. More credit goes to them as it is so easy to just accept the standard of living that those around you have come to expect and even demand. Unfortunately for me it took a radical move to a third world country to realise just how well I was living and what a huge footprint I was leaving behind. I became very much aware of the huge gap between the ways some of us live compared to the poor we are supposed to serve. To decide to do away with any creature comforts at all is a difficult thing to tie down as of its self it is neither right nor wrong. To become blasé about it and even demand it is something else. I believe it's time to scrutinise the way we as brothers live and it's certainly time to be aware of how the majority of the people of this planet live. Yes Brothers communities also can be well off and brothers can live very comfortably indeed. The question is, are we really in solidarity with the poor by living such a life style? The choice to live simply can only be a blessing for our Order and certainly it is always worth reflecting at least occasionally on the way we live in the light of Edmund's Spirit that we cherish and hold dear. He gave all he had and more to the poor of his day and he certainly lived simply and encouraged his brothers to do the same.

The well known story of the rich young man still moves me today and the story about the foolish farmer who was so successful that he needed to build even bigger and better barns only to learn he was to be called to eternal life that very night. These are well known stories that probably caused me to take the life path I did. Storing wealth up here on earth is such a time consuming activity that I can understand how everything else and everyone else can suffer because of it. Here in the Philippines the majority of the country's wealth is said to be in the hands of just a few families. So it's not surprising to hear even in the Philippines the old saying "You can't take it with you" being said even if in gest. This is the catch cry of many a priest's sermon at a funeral Mass and there seems to be one nearly every day here in Hilongos. Then the clincher "It is harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God than it is for a Camel to pass through the eye of a needle" This one always has captured my imagination. Despite this quote, the bottom line, even for the wealthy, is they can live simply and share their wealth if they want to. It's a choice and some wealthy people do make this choice, but the majority don't and that's sad.

We tend to miss simple things here in the Philippines. Things like the availability of a hot shower or the humble little potato which doesn't seem much to ask but seems to be a big asks here. Oh! How I miss that hot shower at the end of a busy day. An air conditioner would be nice too, I tell myself, as the heat is constant but realise very few if any body here can afford such things so we choose to do without, and so I could go on. Last night it started raining and is still going this morning as I write this, our first Cyclone. A tiled roof

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would be nice I say, well you can't have everything. A bucket here and there does the job OK. But there is something more to all this and I feel I may be in danger of missing the boat by carrying on a bit. The environment we live in and the **Footprint** we leave behind is the real issue and may be just as important as the Gospel value of sharing what we have. Even here in Hilongos I sense that people who are very poor don't even think of the environment and in some cases hurt it just as much as the affluent. Some are not good at dealing with their rubbish and others are downright terrible the way they treat the environment. Pollution is a big problem even here in the Philippines where owning a car is only for the well to do. (We certainly don't need one) The poor people here live a certain way maybe because they have no choice but we here in the Hilongos do have a choice. What we can do without and what is essential is often food for discussion.

The question I ask myself is whether, making choices like these is the prerogative of the privileged few or must all people be engaged in making these life choices for the sake of the planet and the sake of the generation yet unborn. The Global warming problem is and will continue to be the biggest challenge mankind has had to face since this planet came into being and an answer must be found soon before the damage is permanent. Everyone, not just Religious, has to choose to live more simply and we need to do it now.

Jesus lived pretty frugally and maybe more because his family were not particularly well off but I bet He was better off than a lot of families around him. At least Joseph had a trade and Jesus may well have followed Joseph into that trade. He spent a lot of time studying the scripture as He knew them back to front and inside out and that must have been hard work and hours of study. Don't think for one moment He could have been zapped with knowledge from above, no way, He worked and lived for thirty years as a normal Nazarene and because Joseph was a good provider Jesus could spend time doing what He loved doing most His Father's business. I suspect Jesus was a cut above the youth of His day and very popular to boot. He was known as a scholar and often was asked to read the scriptures in the local Synagogue. Luke could have fleshed out how he lived or what his life style was like but we only have conjecture and archaeology to help us with that now. I'm sure He left a very small environment footprint but He certainly left a huge human one in the hearts of millions of people. I believe now that we will need to turn to Him and be more faithful to what He taught and to what He believed in and ask for the strength to live more sensitively, with our environment in mind.

I often think if I will I be able to say "the world is a better place for me being in it" when the time comes for me to hang up my boots. I would like to think we all could say this and certainly think my dear friend Br Linus Bowler could say it, so I finish by saying thanks Lord for allowing us know such a humble but great Christian Brother who like Jesus left a FOOTPRINT in peoples heart and nowhere else. Till next time: Peter T – Hilongos the Philippines