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Health in the Lord and the Blessing of the Holy Spirit..[Rule of Saint Albert]
Saudavel iha Maromak no grasa Spirtu Santo Nian .. [Regula Sto Alberto]

'THE BIG EVENT' – CELEBRATING 20 YEARS SINCE EAST TIMOR'S VOTE FOR INDEPENDENCE

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'Mayra was fortunate to receive a formal invitation to the official government celebrations.

This article is her observations and reflections from the evening.'



Carmelites attend book launch



Thousands of people walk to Tasi Tolu

Timor-Leste has been in the spotlight recently. The 20th anniversary of the 1999 popular consultation has been an important time for reflecting on this young countries' achievements and challenges to date. Last month I interviewed Fr. Augusto Galhos about his personal experiences on that historic day, 30th August 1999, when he joined 78.5% of the population in voting for Timor's independence. This month, I'd like to share my own reflections and observations after participating in recent celebrations in Dili.

In contrast to August 1999 when Dili, the capital of Timor-Leste, was a tense city where people felt scared and were being threatened, this last week the city has been a hive of positive life-affirming activity. It's been hard to keep track of what exactly has been happening and where! Among other events, Dili has hosted a week-long popular resistance cultural performance at the exhibition centre, an international solidarity activist's seminar and concert, a book launch, a reunion event for United Nations staff, screenings of two new films and lots of other older films about Timor, an official ceremony to open the new B.J. Habibie bridge, a Diplomacy Training program, a seminar on justice at the National Chega! Centre, an international youth exchange on human rights, a special 20th anniversary mass at the Cathedral, a concert with a visiting Portuguese singer and several exhibitions. Between events, there have been countless coffee dates and joyful impromptu reunions among Timorese and foreigners who have gathered in Dili in preparation for **THE BIG EVENT**, the official ceremony and concert on **30th August in Tasi Tolu**, a suburb on the outskirts of Dili.

The event in Tasi Tolu was broadcast live on television. The organizing committee, chaired by former TL President, Xanana Gusmao, transformed a dusty piece of land with a scattering of trees into a professionally constructed stadium with three grandstands and two large stages. In the afternoon on 30th August 1999, as Fr. Augusto described, the streets of Dili were empty. After casting their votes, everyone went straight home and stayed indoors, fearing further violence. Twenty years later, on the same day, the streets were full of thousands of people walking from Dili to Tasi Tolu to participate in a celebration of what they have achieved. Upon arriving at the venue people were directed to designated areas outside the main arena, where they watched the ceremony on large screens. It was a positive, friendly, patient and enthusiastic crowd, including many young people who may have only heard stories of the violence and intimidation their families endured 20 years ago.



Fireworks at the ceremony

Inside the arena, the talented East Timorese *Berliku Fanu Rai* orchestra played as the VIP guests arrived. There were guests from many countries, including ASEAN nations and the Pacific. The ‘common’ VIPs from Australia included Australians who have worked in solidarity with the Timorese resistance since the Indonesian invasion in 1975, as well as others who have played key roles supporting post-independence Timor-Leste. The Australian Catholic church was represented by Bishop Hilton Deakin and Salesian Brother Michael Lynch. The ‘important’ VIPs (referred to as VVIPs and VVVIPs) included Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Minister for Foreign Affairs Marise Payne, and Leader of the Opposition, Anthony Albanese.



Women in traditional dress at the ceremony

During the ceremony music, visual images and poetry were used as windows into the past, reflecting on Timor-Leste’s resistance struggle leading up to the popular consultation vote in 1999. There were traditional cultural performances from dance groups representing several municipalities, and Order of Timor-Leste awards presented. A very large cake with twenty candles was wheeled into the arena. Twenty people were invited down for a toast, then the cake was cut and distributed among guests. To finish, two bands played resistance songs that were popular in 1999. When the music started, everyone went into the arena and held hands in large circles, dancing the traditional Timorese tebe-tebe while fireworks burst into the sky above. There was a wonderful joyful energy among the crowd. Once the VVIP’s had left, the arena was opened to the public and a concert was held late into the night.

Most striking for me at this ceremony was the President’s address. Francisco Guterres Lu Olo became President in 2017, having previously served as President of the National Parliament from 2002 – 2007. He is also currently President of the Fretilin political party, who are now in opposition. In his address President Lu Olo reflected on the history of the struggle for independence, singling out impactful moments and key people. He then turned to contemporary Timor-Leste, making particularly important comments on two issues relevant to both Timor and Australia: oil and gas, and climate change.

Firstly, a cautionary statement regarding Timor-Leste’s dependence on oil as its primary source of national revenue. In comments that could be read as critical of the current Timorese government’s push to invest heavily in the oil and gas sector, the President acknowledged that “by resorting to oil and gas as sources of revenue, we did not choose a path focussed on the people and on human development. Let us not forget that, in many countries, oil ended up becoming a curse!”

Interestingly, President Lu Olo made no mention of the exchange of notes for the ratification of the Maritime Boundary Treaty between Australia and Timor-Leste that occurred just hours before his speech. A significant achievement for Timor-Leste, this new treaty means the maritime boundary between Australia and Timor-Leste is now along the median line, giving Timor-Leste access to oil and gas fields located on their side of the boundary. The justice-based questions around Timor-Leste’s right to a fair maritime boundary, access to the natural resources within that boundary, and possible compensation for lost revenue prior to the ratification of this treaty, are important. Equally important, however, as President Lu Olo pointed out in his speech, is how Timor-Leste is going to manage this resource in the future.



President Lu Olo

Secondly, the President addressed climate change directly. His comments are particularly relevant in light of the recent Pacific Forum where climate change discussions were a priority and the Australian government worked to dilute the language in the Forum's declaration. President Lu Olo acknowledged the urgency of this issue, stating that "climate change is a reality to which we cannot remain indifferent" and it "is an issue that shapes today's international political agenda". Referring to Timor-Leste's geographical position close to Pacific island countries who "are now in danger of disappearing", he said Timor-Leste wants "more effective cooperation between the international community and communities at risk."

While this small relatively new nation-state has no doubt achieved significant progress over the last 20 years, President Lu Olo has identified two areas where work is still to be done. Reducing dependency on oil and working towards an appropriate response to the climate emergency are issues of both justice and integrity of creation. Issues that both Australia and Timor-Leste can work on, hopefully together.

In conclusion, I want to congratulate the people of Timor-Leste on celebrating this important milestone with enthusiasm and style. I also want to acknowledge the senseless and tragic loss of life that occurred before and after the 1999 popular consultation. This is also a time for grieving. In September there will be ceremonies commemorating several massacres, along with many families gathering to light candles for their loved ones who were killed in the violence that erupted after the results of the popular consultation were announced on 3 September 1999. Also, there will be events to mark the 20 September 1999, when the United Nations international peacekeeping force arrived in Timor-Leste.

If you'd like to read more reflections on Timor-Leste's achievements and challenges over the last two decades, I recommend the following articles:

Celebrating democracy and peace in Timor-Leste, by Fausto Belo Ximenes.

https://thediomat.com/2019/08/celebrating-democracy-and-peace-in-timor-leste/?fbclid=IwAR1EpH7dUuX7z0eBKQUMTBkR6cliU1jBXj8p_g2tdyX3M6CCbNkcvDxSjVs

Twenty years after Independence, Timor-Leste continues it's epic struggle, by Sara Niner.

<http://theconversation.com/twenty-years-after-independence-timor-leste-continues-its-epic-struggle-121631>

After a border dispute and spying scandal, can Australia and Timor-Leste be good neighbours?, by Michael Leach.

<https://theconversation.com/after-a-border-dispute-and-spying-scandal-can-australia-and-timor-leste-be-good-neighbours-121553>

God of life and love,

Your Son taught us to seek the reign of righteousness in all that we do.

We place our concerns before you.

*We pray for the people of Timor Leste, and especially for those who are on trial
because of their work of justice for East Timor.*

May integrity and truth govern the words and actions of all involved.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

(provided by Sr Susan Connelly rsj)



Australian Catholic Bishops'
SOCIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT
*"MAKING IT REAL ...Genuine
Human Encounter in our
Digital World"*

FOR YOUR CALENDAR – SEPTEMBER

- 1st Sept - Seasons of Creation month begins*
- Beginning of National Biodiversity month*
- 8 Sept – Child Protection Sunday*
- 13 Sept – 2007: Adoption by The UN of Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*
- 15 Sept – International Day of Democracy*
- 16 Sept – International Day for Preservation of the Ozone Layer*
- 21 Sept – International Day of Peace*
- 21 Sept – World Alzheimer's Day*
- 26 Sept – International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons*
- 29 Sept – SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY**
- 30 Sept – 1975 – Ratification by Australia of International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*

" MAKING IT REAL: Genuine human encounter in our digital world"

We celebrate **Social Justice Sunday on 29 September**. This year, the Australian Bishops' Social Justice Statement is titled: 'Making it Real: Genuine human encounter in our digital world'. It shares Pope Francis' challenge to us to 'boldly become citizens of the digital world'. It points out that we are called not just to be inhabitants of this world, but active citizens shaping it. The Statement affirms the positive possibilities for encounter and solidarity offered by new digital media, while warning of those elements of our digital world that may be harmful. These include information overload; social isolation; marginalisation of the vulnerable; consumerism and fake news.

For those of us who are not 'digital natives', finding our way around the wide range of contemporary digital platforms can be challenging. Fear of falling victim to hoaxes, fake news, privacy breaches – or just wasting time scrolling endlessly through social media feeds – can hold us back. Some of us find it difficult to learn new technologies, and appreciate the help of younger people who know how to make use of them. Listening to people in parishes, I hear that often it is the desire to keep in touch with far flung family and friends that draws us to engage with social media. Our parishes, schools and other Catholic organisations have been quick to embrace the positive possibilities for communication and connection, and Pope Francis himself encourages us to 'boldly become citizens of the digital world'.

As we enter the Season of Creation, the Amazon is ablaze, with many fires set by agribusinesses that illegally invade and burn the forest in order to create cattle ranches. *Pray and reflect using this PRAYER*

Dear Lord, we come before you with a heavy heart,
as we know Your heart must be heavy,
grieving for the loss
of precious life in the Amazon.

We pray that in Your mercy
You will forgive our ways of life,
for we have created the markets
for beef, timber, and minerals
taken from the Amazon.

We pray that You will forgive those who set
fires in the Amazon,
those who cut down the ancient trees,
those who plunder the waters
to fulfil their hunger.

Our God, Your mercy is infinite
and Your power to redeem is untold.
Grant us Your grace
as we turn to new ways of life,
and send your love like a balm
to heal the scorched earth and its people.

In the name of Your son, Jesus,
we pray. Amen.