

Dear Friends of Africa

December 2018

Some time ago I was asked to lead an opening prayer at an Engagement ceremony. My host was an old time acquaintance from my early days in Tanganyika. The lawns and gardens around the house had been adorned with potted flowers and electronic finery. However the twinkling little electric lights had to compete with the tropical starry night. The function was for the daughter of my very dear friend. We have known one another for many years and although now a quite successful business man he never lost his love for his birthplace and kept a special affection for the traditions and reverence for their tribal ways and language. There was however little to distinguish the present celebration from any genteel European ceremony. Then of a sudden the elder sister of the bride to be stood up unannounced and very authoritatively declared that the celebration should not carry on until the grandmother of the bride to be had her say. And speak she did briefly but movingly first in Swahili and finishing her talk very emotionally in her tribal language Kimwera. When she had concluded her little exhortation her eldest daughter took the floor again and declared that, "Our Mother has spoken." Then she went on to inform the invited guests that they were of a matrilineal tribe and continued her speech in the Wamwera language'. Hearing their mother tongue spoken all the Wamwera women were on their feet in a flash and they gathered around their Matriarch and they all began to roll on the ground around the queen mother extolling exuberantly the glories of motherhood . High heeled shoes and fancy slippers were strewn in grand disarray and the fluttering and flapping finery of the evening gowns swirled about the grandmother, undismayed as she serenely surveyed the vortex of humanity roiling around her. Some of the invited guests were aghast but others joyfully joined in. The men were for the most part speechless I am sure that a study

of matrilineal customs might well be of help in our own efforts today in the movement toward women's liberation.

During my first dozen years living in the south of Tanzania I had witnessed similar acts of homage and honor to women. It was common, for example at a wedding for all the women to lie prostrate at the door of the church where they became a living and breathing walk way for the newlyweds on their ceremonial walk to their new home domicile. The idea here being that in their married life they could depend on their neighbors for mutual help and support.

The school closed the first Saturday of December and our school compound is deserted. Our school pet dog is bereft without even the perpetual presence of the crows to chase. They are ever on hand to pick up the remnants of snacks and treats the girls leave behind on the lawns and in the hedges. These birds are almost identical with the Americana crow in size and bold reputation but with an eye catching white collar and pure white vest. We have a school regulation that whenever a student is crossing the parade ground she must run or at least trot and the school dog is absolutely delighted with this practice for the girls who are afraid of Gifty, the dog she delights with the fearful pace they put on and for those who just want to keep pace she does circles around them to get them a move on. Another regulation also applies to the parade ground which is also called the Smart Area. There should never be a piece of paper or trash of any kind lying around there. I always manage however to find a biscuit wrapper or some sort of trash. I never let it lie but pick up whatever comes my way. The students are shamed when I do so and come on the run to take it from me. When I tell them to go find their own because these are mine they skive around for something to pick up and be returned to the rank of goodness. They also are deeply attuned when any visitor or teacher is approaching school to carry any bag or briefcase they may be carrying and whether young or old they will

make this offer. Often however the visitor especially a non African will decline the offer meaning of course they don't wish to be a brother but our students feel belittled, a clash of cultures. I often joke with our students that the time may well come when they will have to carry me myself not just my briefcase. But they brush my hair back, the little that is left, and assure me that we are altogether. It is a reassuring family caring atmosphere that has come over our school. You all have done so much in carrying the hundreds of these adolescent African children to the threshold adult life. May the Good Lord walk with you too and bless you and your families.



Sincerely, Father Damian

Our pictures today portray a transition. The first was of a group photo taken in 2002 of the so called bush chapel. It was built by Rosminian Missionaries in 1946 of sun dried brick. It served as a two year primary school and a Sunday place of

worship. The second photo is of the same building at present serving as a dining room and library for our Parochial school. My sister Elizabeth and her husband Jim Williams stand next to me at the doorway.



DINING ROOM AND LIBRARY

I would like to share this beautiful little poem which I read to our Muslim students on Maulidi the birthday of Mohamed.

This poem is entitled "Abou Ben Adhem" a Muslim theme by James Henry Hunt.

*Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)  
 Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,  
 And saw, within the moonlight in his room,  
 Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,  
 An Angel writing in a book of gold:  
 Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,  
 And to the Presence in the room he said,  
 "What writest thou?" the vision raised its head,  
 And with a look made of all sweet accord  
 Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord."  
 "And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"  
 Replied the Angel. Abou spoke more low,  
 But cheerily still; and said, "I pray thee, then,  
 Write me as one that loves his fellow-men."  
 The Angel wrote, and vanished. The next night  
 It came again with a great wakening light,  
 And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,*

*And, lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest!  
I am most grateful for your generosity in lending us your helping hand,*