

## SINGAPORE

DAY 15 – 8<sup>th</sup> July 2008

This morning I woke to find a message from Father Teyrnon telling me that Father John Dermody had decided to stop treatment and just concentrate on palliative care. I admire his courage in making this decision, and I am sure that you will continue to pray for him now, as I do, as he enters the next stage of his illness. I am sure that knowing that people are praying for him will be a great aid to him, regardless of what might happen.

After a quick breakfast this morning, we headed once again to an airport! This time it was the relatively new terminal at Bangkok International Airport. Clare, who had visited her daughter recently, warned me that the shops were a temptation, yet there was still a long way to walk to get to the gates. Not being that interested in shopping, we managed to pass the wide variety (impressive though they might have been), and we headed for the VIP lounge near our gate. This time, although there was no cooked food as in Hong Kong, there was a wide variety of sandwiches and cakes available, as well as a large selection of drinks, but this lounge was by far the most comfortable yet, and it was all we could to keep awake and not miss the call for our flight.

For the flight to Singapore, Cathay Pacific had laid on a 747-400 – one of the largest planes, and of course with plenty of room, since there were many empty seats. However, there was quite a bit of turbulence for the two hours – at one stage even the flight attendants were told to be seated and stop serving. Dominic, who has not experienced such wild turbulence, was delighted. As a well-seasoned traveller I am used to it by now – still not the worst that I've had – that was from London to Rome when the plane fell several hundred feet – with meals ending up on the ceiling and people bouncing around the cabin!! But that's another story!

We landed and passed through passport control and customs without any problem. I was somewhat anxious, since Singapore has such a reputation about allowing various things into the country – only one packet of cigarettes, no chewing gum, no drugs (without a prescription), etc. But there were no obvious checks, though going through the Green Channel did not mean that no-one would be stopped, and while we went through each “desk” had someone opening their case for the authorities!

A taxi ride took us to our hotel, and in the afternoon we went for a short walk, visiting the Catholic Cathedral. It is in a poor state, mainly down to the weather. Although most churches are built in a Gothic style here, the Cathedral is Romanesque. Sadly this does not lend itself to the humid equatorial weather, and so much of the plaster is falling off the walls, both inside and outside. We also visited, for the first time, Raffles Hotel. This of course, is so famous in itself, that it hardly needs any explanation, but simply to say that the modern city was founded by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles.

When we got back to the hotel I called an old friend, Terence Siew, who studied Mathematics with me at Imperial College 30 years ago. I have kept in touch with a few colleagues from my college days, but I had not seen Terence since he returned to Singapore. He was conscripted into the Army and ended up in Beijing for several

years. He now works for the Singapore Government in the Environment Agency, and often accompanies the Minister to various international meetings. If Singapore were in the G-7 or G-8, then he would have been away this week.

Fortunately, he was in. He collected us after work, and we went to his home. He is a devout Catholic (as are many of Chinese origin in Singapore). His father died of cancer two years ago, and his mother is now suffering with Alzheimer's. His wife, Clarisse, was not in, since she was leading a retreat for her fellow workers, but his daughter, Maria Therese was at home, though she was studying for a Chinese oral exam tomorrow.

So, Terence, Dominic and I went to his local Chinese restaurant, and were treated to a feast. Terence, of course, told the owner that I was a priest (there was a huge picture of her and her son with the local bishop on the wall), so she was delighted, and throughout the meal various gifts and samples of food came our way. It was difficult to get through the 20 or so courses that ended up on the table.

Afterwards we had fruit back at Terence's home, prepared by his Filipino maid (whose main duty is to look after his mother), and that was an opportunity to talk about our Filipino community in Morriston!

Terence then drove us round the area of his home, showing the local Church, Catholic schools and various organisations connected with the Church. Up until relatively recently the Church owned a considerable amount of land in the area, but the Government have taken back the land, while providing improved buildings for the schools, etc.

After collecting his daughter from a Physics class (this was 9.30 pm), Terence conducted us on a guided tour around the main sights of Singapore. It was good to orientate us, and have the Singapore system explained to us too. We finally got back to the hotel just before 11.00 pm and waved good-bye to our friends.

DAY 16 – 9<sup>th</sup> July 2008

This morning was the first time in several days, when we did not have a set programme, and no set time necessitating an alarm call. So we did not arrive for breakfast until just before 9.30 am.

We spent most of the day walking. First of all we went to famous Sim Lim Square – five floors of shops selling computers, cameras, mobile phones and software. It is world-famous, and if there is anything to be had in the technical world, you can buy it here! However, the two shoppers from Wales resisted every temptation and managed to walk away with nothing!! The experience, however, was enough!



We then made our way to the Singapore Flyer – the local equivalent of the London Eye – a large Ferris Wheel that moves slowly around, so that by the time you reach the top you have a good idea of the set out of the city. The Singapore Flyer is actually higher than the one in London, and at the moment claims to be the largest in the world! Naturally it is geared for tourists, and there are plenty of shops and restaurants around the base. This time we did succumb to having some lunch there.



Then we wandered back towards the hotel, calling in at the Merlion (a cross between a Mer(maid) and a Lion), to welcome visitors to the City of Lions! We stopped briefly outside the Parliament Building and the Law Courts, before arriving back at the hotel, just in time before the heavens opened for a traditional afternoon rain-storm.

