

E-BULLETIN # 26

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5,16)

item 55



the power of touch

While giving a seminar for school children, I asked a teenager towards the end of the session: 'tell me the one moment of your life you remember and cherish most?' and he answered: 'it is my mother and father's hug before I leave for school'. This was the inspiration for me to pen these few thoughts.

When was the last hand-shake or hug you truly gave?

Willison and Masson comment: 'therapeutic touch, as described in the literature, ranges from simple hand contact to a full embrace'. However young or old one is, we know for sure this touch makes one feel worthwhile irrespective of the cultural ethos or daily ordeals we encounter. Kathleen Keating, the author of 'the hug therapy' says: 'we are suffering in our society from a sad condition best described as touch deprivation, skin hunger and hug inhibition...Touch is the primary way we contact and connect with each other. Touch is the experience of how I meet you and you meet me and we meet the world'.

It is a way to say hello and good-bye. It can give comfort in times of need, worry or disappointment. It can express gratitude. Hugs have a positive influence on IQ, aging, self-esteem, and stress. Research has shown that touch contributes to the physical, emotional and even spiritual well-being of an individual. For example, touch can improve the course of several clinical conditions including growth and development of pre-term infants, reducing pain, increasing attentiveness, diminishing depression, and enhancing the immune function. Touch gets underneath many of the defences we erect and helps us to come back to reality. Every hug we give and receive is not a fantasy but real, enhancing one's intra-personal and inter-personal relationships. Tiffany Field, founder of the Touch Research Institute, adds that touch deprivation impairs development among children not only causing weight loss but making them more aggressive. Spiritually it can lift up one's spirit even to the extent of restoring again what was once forgotten - being flexible, being inspired by vision and values, understanding and growing in self-awareness.

Touch has its own language, best understood in the act rather than its definition. Therapist Anne Says: 'just a simple touch can provide another avenue of information that is not available through verbal interaction alone'. This allows one to transcend the gap between self and others. Jesus 'touched them' and healed people. In his parable, when the younger son swallowed up the property and returned home, the father

clasped him in his arms and kissed him. Indeed, a hug of acceptance and forgiveness. Is there a hug culture in our family?

Touch exists even in the animal world. They hug their young ones. Are we humans moving towards a hands-off culture? Many of us have to hunt for jobs, prepare for exams, others are burdened with worries. If you get one hug in the midst of this topsy-turvy situation be thankful – but if not, give one!

Wherever I am let my healing touch also be.

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item 56



cattle have right of way

[Columban](#) missionary **Father Tomas King**, speaks about his journey with cattle herders and shows us a landscape in peril.

It is a four-hour drive from the Columban parish of Badin to the Thar Parkar desert. It is located on the bottom right hand corner of Pakistan, right on the border with India. It is the homeland of the Parkari Kohli Tribal People, one of the ethnic groups among whom the Columbans work. There is a small but vibrant Catholic community of nearly one hundred families living in 15 villages scattered over an area half the size of Ireland.

Since my appointment to the remote parish of Nagar Parkar, in November 2008, I have crossed the Thar Parkar desert several times a month to visit the Catholic Community. My trips in and out seldom coincide with the cattle drive but last August, I spent four hours on the first half of the journey mostly in second gear because of the sheer volume of cattle migrating.

Thousands of cattle divided in numerous herds were seeking to escape the devastating floods. Their food supply had been ruined so they sought fresh grass in the Nagar Parkar region.

Twice a year there is the seasonal movement of thousands of cattle. It is an amazing sight to see the cattle and their drovers trek slowly across the desert. It highlights the reality of being away from home for weeks and months on end.

Their drovers walk and sleep with their cattle, like the good shepherd in the parable of Jesus, the drovers know their cattle and their cattle know them. Drovers often have some goats of their own and can be seen carrying a young kid wrapped around their shoulders like a scarf. What milk the cows have is sold to villagers along the seven-day trek across the desert.

Salination is ruining the land in some parts of interior Sindh but the big landowners, who often have more land than they know what to do with, are not doing anything



about it. It is an expensive and slow process to reclaim the land for crop production.

In Pakistan, about 6.3 million hectares of land are salt-affected, of which 1.89 million hectares are saline, and about 40,000 hectares of productive land are damaged by salinity annually. The landlords do not want to face the expense of curing the land so it is just left fallow and is a source of fodder for migrating cattle. The herders belong to a Sindhi Muslim ethnic people who pass on their way of life from generation to generation. Some herders own their own flock but many work as employees of the herd owner. As well as flocks of cattle, there are other obstacles to the journey across the desert. Local security forces, as is their right, are extremely vigilant of ex-patriots coming and going in this border region with India. At this stage those manning the check posts now know me and let me pass without much fuss.

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