

“One who sees something good must narrate it”

This Ganda (Uganda) proverb was shared with me by Father Joseph Healy in my request for information about the African culture. These wonderful proverbs are designed to share the customs, values, philosophy of the people of Africa (or any country), and play a large role in understanding African culture. His role in Africa is to narrate that which is good and communicate it to the world. He has done this in his book, “Towards An African Narrative Theology” and through a site on the website www.maryknollafrica.org.

So first things first. How did I find Father Joe who lives in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and has as his ministrycommunications? My friend, Marilyn, has an uncle, Father Moe, that is a priest in Nairobi, Africa. Although it is often very difficult to get communications to him I took a chance and sent an email. In two days time I heard from Father Joe who had been sent a request to respond to me from Father Moe! And so my lessons continue.

Some of the key “good” that I found to “narrate” include the following proverbs:

1. When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion. Amharic (Ethiopia) Proverbthe power of community.....
2. It takes a whole village to raise a child. Hilary Clinton...just kidding it is from Igbo and Yoruba (Nigeria) Proverb.....the power of community and participation.....
3. Let the guest come so that the host or hostess may benefit (get well). Swahili (Eastern and Central)the power of relationships.....

Now you might be saying something like, “Whoa, that is not very earth shaking!” But isn’t it really the simple things that we need to be reminded of that keep us focused on what really is important in our lives? And these proverbs are powerful ways to tell a story. And it takes time to tell these wonderful stories that make up our cultures....not only the cultures of the way we live, but also the way we work.

This is one that I found especially interesting and one that I would apply to my life, “Atannayita: y’atenda nnyina obufumbi” or “The person who has not traveled widely thinks his or her mother is the only cook (the best cook) Ganda (Uganda).....This proverb teaches the opposite value of just staying home and encourages people to go out and learn from others. Without doing this human beings can be self-centered and think that they are better than others. By staying in their own little world people become isolated. Traveling enables you to broaden your mind and enlarge your experience. Being a military brat I did have a chance to do lots of traveling my first 18 years. My did it enlarge my experience!! Through my travels I even found my “beloved”!!

I think it would be interesting to have a proverb for our own home or for our workplace. What would your proverb communicate? What would your story be?

And to Father Joe and Father Moe.....thank you for sharing your “food”.