



After an unusually pleasant (and punctual!) flight with Airlines PNG, I landed in Losuia to an unforgettable sight. The airport was a tiny structure whose perimeter fence was packed with people. It seemed that half the island's population of 40,000 was there to ogle the new arrivals or await the latest mail. Mercifully, Fr Sonny was already around to help retrieve my luggage once these were flung with

total disregard on the grassy ground.

The Bible seminar began the next day, 09 May (Monday) and was attended by some 120 parish leaders. These came from the island's six Catholic communities. Mixed with the predominantly elderly crowd were some 15 'youths'. Apparently, in Kiriwina, to be called 'youth' meant that the young person was an 'out-of-school' drop out. When I inquired why there were not that many young people (since the villages we passed by all seemed like 'children-factories'), the parish elders gently explained to me that now was their time, and that the 'time' of the youth would have to wait for the future.

For the next five days I gave three lectures and/or conducted workshops daily, two in the morning and one in the afternoon until 4:30 PM. The 15 talks spanned the entire Bible and included bible sharing sessions, dances, drama and art. In 2002 I had given a similar seminar to the village folk of Kelolageia and Kurada in Normanby Island. What struck me with this latest venture was the eagerness and consistent number of participants. Never in the next five days did we go below 100 attendees. Believers belonging to the United Church and a local 'Rema' faith community (including their pastor!) were also there. Participants who belonged to the 'nearby' villages walked to and fro daily, i.e. anywhere from an hour to an hour-and-a-half journey on foot. Others were accommodated in the parish and school compound. In the evenings, for relaxation, we showed some movies which were eagerly

awaited and attended by all the village children. To commemorate the beatification of our dearly beloved John Paul II, we viewed a two-part Italian produced film on his life (in English, of course). But the highlight of the nocturnal movie-viewing was a Jackie Chan film which had the village people roaring with laughter. During my stay, the community of sisters, Daughters of Mary Immaculate (PIME Sisters), generously cooked our meals. That was a welcome respite, since in the parish house there was no electricity and barely any running water. Benignly, at least the parish house was well-screened so the ever ubiquitous mosquitoes were left outside (!) even if the invasion of millipedes was not kept at bay.

I flew out of Kiriwina the next Sunday, 15 May, deeply impressed by the warmth of the people and the paucity of opportunity and the dearth of hope for the island's youth. The valiant efforts of missionaries past (MSC and PIME) and those present (Reparation Sisters in Gusaweta; PIME Sisters in Wapipi; and Fr Sonny) are truly inspiring. I deeply pray that our 'sharing of the Word' may sustain the people of Kiriwina in their trials and nurture their faith.

