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Dear

Alastair Cook was a BBC correspondent who, for three decades, wrote his weekly "Letter from America" and every week commanded a record radio audience on both sides of the Atlantic. His programme used to fascinate me and I always made an attempt to listen to it. He appealed to king and knave, to prince and ploughman. As I am in America at the moment I will write of my American experience.

Each year, as a member of the Society of St. James, we have to visit parishes in different countries to present the work of the Society and to appeal for funds. Appealing for funds is never very pleasant but it is totally necessary and attending to the poor and needy is also a fundamental Christian obligation. I look on it as a way of enabling people to make their contribution towards helping the poor of the world.

I am at the moment in the parish of St. Peter's in the city of Corpus Christi in the State of Texas. I must say that I have been very well received and the parish priest and people have been extraordinarily good to me. It is an exemplary parish. The laity participates at every level and they have so many different courses going for young, newlyweds, divorced to those seeking annulments from their marriages. I am wheeled here and there as they want to find out more about the mission in Ecuador. There are those who read the article about my work in the 'Comite del Pueblo' in the Readers Digest a few years ago and so a connection had already existed. So many are just exemplary Catholics and the faith comes natural to them. I find that in America they are more spiritually aware than most parts of Europe. Material wealth does not seem to be an obstacle to deep faith.

How I arrived in Texas is another story. Six months ago I had to replace the hip replacement I had done in Scotland nine months previously. It was done in Ecuador. I no longer have an insurance policy to have it done in the States. I think that it was quite successful but the situation in the barrio was not very conducive to recuperation. The ground and the streets are so uneven, I have to climb twenty odd steps to get into my flat and travelling by car along the so called streets is like riding on a cork on the wild Atlantic waves. Progress or recuperation was always interrupted when I would trip or fall and pull a muscle or something. The past months have been spent on crutches, or wheel chairs or whatever. Parish activity can also be like living in a tumble dryer and one is tossed about, up and down, to right and to left, in and out You are never sure when your feet will touch the ground.

Anyhow, I left the house in Ecuador at 8 p.m. on Friday evening (wheel chair service was provided by the airline), travelled through the night only to find that I had missed my 8 a.m. connection in Atlanta (Georgia); I then had to make my way to Houston only to find that I had again missed my flight and, not only that, but that I had to change airports and cross the city in order to connect with my final flight to Corpus Christi. I passed through the very centre of the city (downtown as they say here) and I did not see one single individual on the streets from one end of the city to another. If extra-terrestrials passed that way they would be wondering what type of life lived on the planet. Only cars and vehicles could be seen. Anyhow, someone was meeting me at the airport and I finally arrived in the parish at 4 p.m. My first Mass there was at six p.m. The following Sunday I preached at another five masses but I was glad to be in the parish.

As I said, the people here are very kind. A doctor approached me after mass and asked about my leg. He expressed a desire to help. The next day he had arranged a MRI (a type of sophisticated x-ray – some 60 images of my knee) and at a cost of \$6,000. The company only asked for \$100 dollars for the late night technician. The boss had been to Ecuador and had seen the poor barrios and was pleased to help because I worked in the shanty towns. Another friend of a friend referred me to an orthopedic doctor who examined me and sent me for further tests. I have still to get these results and so the epic story has not come to an end. I am very appreciative of these attentions as I had come to the end of the road with Ecuadorian doctors. The surgeon admitted that he could not fathom why there was so much pain in the leg. It could come from many sources and a lot more tests would be needed and most likely he did not have the equipment. I had not considered medical attention in the States as, without an insurance, it is a financial impossibility. We shall see how things develop.

The other big news here is the death of Senator Kennedy. Without doubt he was one of the greatest American politicians, the best President that the States never had. The tributes from rich and poor, from countries all over the world flood the television channels these days. I was indebted to him when I was in trouble with corrupt judges in Ecuador. He took time off to phone government officials in Ecuador and assure them that he was following my case and would expose any corruption that might occur. The American ambassador also offered me a suite in his house when I had to go “underground” and I am sure that Kennedy was behind it all though I did know the American ambassador who was there at that time May the good senator rest in the peace of the Lord. His mother, Rose, was baptized and buried in the Society Church in Boston. She also was an exceptional woman.

What else have I to write about? Yes, the weather. The temperature here is over one

hundred every day. I do not find the heat so oppressive as humidity is low in comparison to Ecuador. It is humidity that makes heat quite unbearable. They have the worst drought in one hundred years. Last season’s crops of cotton and corn have been lost and the ground is breaking up. It is all lovely flat arable lands that look very fertile. They differentiate between farmers and ranchers. Farmers till and sow the soil whereas ranchers have cattle and feed them by grazing them on the natural grass growing on their lands. Texas is a huge State, about the size of Britain. It is rich in oil and agricultural products. It once belonged to Mexico and has had a steady influx of immigrants from there during the years and so Spanish is used throughout. I see very few traces of the indigenous Indian tribes that once owned the land. They seem to have disappeared.

My next parish is in Orlando, Florida, the home of Disneyland. There must be a lot of Spanish speaking people in that area too as four of the eight masses I have there are to be in Spanish. I cannot say much about Orlando as that is to come.

I have rambled on sufficiently and must now conclude. If you find that the letter is too extensive you can leave off reading it till the long winter nights creep in once again. September is a lovely month at home in Scotland and you should make the most of the good weather as winter approaches.

God bless you all and keep you in good humour.

Fr Colin

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