

Pastor's Corner December 5, 2009

Walking With Christ in Haiti – Part 3

Our last day at Cap Haitien brought us to our proposed 2010 Lenten Starfish project- Nativity Village #6. Some 8,000 people live in Shada along the polluted canal that winds through Haiti's 2nd largest city. As our group walked along the river the stench was overpowering. Amidst the garbage, smell and polluted water was a small primary school. Children attend school only if their parents can come up with the \$10 dollar monthly tuition. Most schools in Haiti are private; all the school children wear uniforms. The garbage that collects along the rivers edge helps to form landfill that will hopefully keep the water from overflowing into their small shacks that we would never allow our animals to live in. To illustrate the destitution of the area we passed by a man who was roasting a pig which appeared to be about 100 pounds, over a small fire. We were told that it would probably take at least a day, probably two with the small wood fire for it to be fully cooked- with all the entrails. When one is starving everything is consumed- even the innards.

Our 6th Nativity Village project will relocate these river people to higher- and safer- ground several miles away. They will become part of our other already formed communities with new houses of their own. Change is difficult for any of us and

some will undoubtedly resist leaving. The best chance to find any menial job is usually near a city. And these jobs vary from day to day and hour to hour. We saw one man pulling and two pushing a rig with some 50 bags of cement each weighing over 100 pounds. Their pay? About 30 to 40 cents US. Scenes like this as well as the man cooking his pig over a few pieces of wood seem primitive- almost caveman-like. We have so many reality shows on TV, that in my mind are anything but reality. The scenes we saw today are reality for hundreds of thousands.

In the afternoon we visited the Prolonge swamp. Through your sacrificial gifts we have provided new houses to more than 350 families in this area, but many still live in the swamp. It is an ongoing project. It was here that I encountered another scene which I will not soon forget. A woman with a large strainer in one hand and an even bigger basket in the other was in some three feet of muddy water trying to catch small crabs- no more than an inch- and fish about the same size. Her face spoke to us with strength, determination and faith. When we asked what she would do with them we were told she would use some for her meal and the others she would sell to neighbors. A woman wearing a dress kneeling in mud up to her waist trying to survive! This some 600 miles from Disneyworld! This was and is reality and it will probably never be part of any television series.

A ray of hope was realized that afternoon when we visited and blessed our 5th Nativity Village at Demier. Food for the Poor had arranged for a celebration lunch for 250 of the residents, along with new shoes and colorful berets for the girls and soccer balls for the boys. It was chaos however. Someone had “leaked” the news of the food to people in neighboring villages several miles away. More than 1,000 people descended upon the village . Since none of us were able to perform a “multiplication” miracle, many got nothing to eat. This is reality in Haiti- walking miles for the promise of rice and beans. I thought at that moment of all the food that we throw away simply because of an expiration label on a box or can. This IS reality!

At our last meal together back at the hotel (rice, beans, vegetables and goat) we poured our hearts out to one another at what we had seen these past days. We all had walked through the Beatitudes of the Gospel. We had truly lived in four days the words of St. Matthew in his Gospel Chapter 25.

FEED THE HUNGRY.....we had fed hundreds, many with the orange hair of malnutrition.

GIVE DRINK TO THE THIRSTY....we experienced young children begging for our half-empty bottles of water.

CLOTHED THE NAKED.....We saw many who walked with no shoes. Children walking with just a tee shirt on and some wearing nothing. We passed out nearly 1,000 pairs of shoes.

IN PRISON AND YOU VISITED ME...we walked through the Cap Haitien prison, gave shoes and food to the 563 inmates. Fr. Duken orchestrated the release of 4 of the young men. We washed their feet in imitation of Jesus at the Last Supper, gave them them new shoes and a little money, and walked them out the gate.

SICK AND YOU CAME TO ME....especially in the Little Children of Jesus handicapped home, we held and comforted the broken children.

And while ten of our parishioners walked literally in this poorest country of the Western Hemisphere, YOU through your prayers and sacrificial monetary offerings were walking right along with us. None of this would ever have become a reality were it not for your generous support – your checks and ziplock bags of coins. I am most grateful and know that I speak for the thousands who now, while still poor, are beginning to live in dignity. YOU made their dream- their prayer- a reality.

What more could you do? If these past three weeks bulletins of our journey spoke to you, you might pass them along to

another, rather than toss them into the trash. Not only is this the “green” thing to do these days- you might even motivate someone else to become involved in helping the destitute. Look what started from a simple, quiet ,late night walk with my dog “Pete” some eleven years ago. God does work in mysterious and wonderful ways doesn’t He?

For more info – www.operation-starfish.org