

EDITORIAL

La Salette

VISION & MISSION



By Fr. Thomas Vellappallil, ms Vol 16-2013# 3

Dear Co-missioners,

Father Flavio Gillio is a Jesuit from Italy who is asking to become a La Salette and join the North American Province. He is discerning with us impressed by the charism of reconciliation given at La Salette by the Blessed Mother during her apparition on the 19th of September 1846. Fr. Bernie Baris who is pastor of Our Lady of the Cape parish in Brewster invited him to visit Haiti. Fr. Bernie's passion and love for the people of Haiti is so evident when he tells us that it was his thirteenth trip to Haiti.

The presence of the La Salette missionaries in Haiti officially began about 3 years ago. There are two La Salette missionaries from Madagascar, Fr. Evariste and Fr. Herve at present serving the Haitian people. They are in Bayonnais, a small rural village up in the mountains. They have a small school. Some of the students attend class in the Church and others in three small shelters outside. Fr. Bernie speaks loudly of the need for a school building as he sees the education of children very important to bringing hope and rebuilding an already impoverished nation, especially after the devastating earthquake in 2010.



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Fr. Flavio Gillio with kids

remembered that something similar also happened to Fr. Bernie during his first visit some thirteen years ago and it encouraged me. I repeated to myself: if it happened to him, and this is his thirteenth visit, then maybe things can change for me as well.

The Stark Reality of Haitian Daily Life

I was struggling within myself, constantly questioning myself. Before leaving for Haiti various people told me: “You are going to love the experience”. Once there, the problem was that I did not understand why they had told me that. To be quite honest, during my first two days I was not able to perceive the beauty of Haiti. I was simply disturbed by the unimaginably hard conditions in which these people have to live each day. The four-hour trip from the airport in Port Au Prince to Dessalines, where we were supposed to stay, had been for me like a waterfall of poverty and misery. This is what I perceived during our first few days. Beyond the main roads there are no roads, no signals and very few traffic lights. During our trip I saw a lot of people walking by foot and women walking with huge baskets on their heads. Believe me, these baskets are heavy. I tried to carry one of them myself, full of chickens, because I wanted to verify its weight. They are really heavy! I can’t imagine doing that

almost every day for twenty or more years. Most houses are very small. A lot of them are made out of wood or mud. A lot of them have neither water nor electricity. This is especially true in the rural areas that we have been visiting – in Gilbert and Heutefeuille. In Dessalines, the city where we are staying, there are none of what we would call “conventional” shops. At night the town is dark because there is simply no electricity. People sell their wares in the main square and in the streets but they have to light some candles in order to see anything. When we finally arrived at the Sisters’ house it was like arriving at a quiet and peaceful oasis.



Fr. Bernie Baris, MS

Through the kindness of Fr. Bernie Baris, M.S., pastor of the parish of Our Lady of the Cape in Brewster MA and some of his parishioners, I arrived in Haiti on Feb. 19th, 2013, with Fr. Bernie. The personal impact of this brief visit to Haiti has been profound and very challenging. By the evening of my first day I already wanted to leave and to go back to the USA. But I did not. I did not even share my initial thoughts with Fr. Bernie or with Sr. Christine. I

The Beautiful, Thankful Children

The next morning I had a second challenge. Fr. Bernie took me to the school next to the Sisters' house. The space was full of children – all in their beautiful blue clothes. The girls had nice white ribbons in their hair. They all gathered in front of St. Claire's School. They sang a song; I guess it was a prayer. It was in Creole. I did not understand most of it. I only understood a few words: "Merci, merci, merci, bon Dieu, merci" (thanks, thanks, thanks, thanks to our good God). As I initially heard these words, I felt angry. My reaction was: "for what do they have to be thankful?" I still had vivid lingering images of the destitute poverty I had seen the day before. The feeling I had was that these people do not live but rather they merely try to survive. What else can they do? A lot of people have to walk for a couple of hours to get some water; and believe me, the heat is incredible! We all have been sweating from the oppressive heat since we arrived! If these people want to take a bath they have to travel again to a nearby river. They repeat this same process when they wish to wash their clothes.

Making a Difference

With all this in mind I was asking myself: for what are these children thankful? I was impressed by the beauty of their faces, especially their eyes. They were happy to see me and Fr. Bernie. When they finished their song, they all ran toward us. They asked us to grab their hands and told us with a big smile: "Bonjour (Good morning)". It was so natural for us to just hug them all. It was these children that helped change my initial perspective. Their smiles made me understand that this small school was making a big difference in their life. These children reminded me of Fr. Bernie's words: "Maybe Our Lady of the Cape Parish cannot change the whole country, but it can make a difference for some people". I was facing just such a "difference". These children led me from being focused on the poverty of the people to the signs of hope surrounding them.



Many Signs of Hope

And in these past few days I have seen many signs of hope. Our visit to the Dispensary next to the school was a sign of hope. It is run with a lot of zeal by Sr. Valentine, a young sister from Madagascar. The Parish and the Rectory that Fr. Marc-Eddy built in the town of Dessalines has been another sign of hope. In this church I have witnessed a joyful Haitian wedding. The School, Claire Lumiere, and the other schools and chapels I visited with Fr. Bernie and Fr. Marc-Eddy

are still other signs of hope. In some of these schools we distributed many dolls to the young students. I'm sure that these simple, small dolls made a great impression on these children! The Masses I celebrated with the local communities have been one more sign of hope for me. I can say the same as far as the uplifting conversations I have had during meals with Sr. Christine, Sr. Valentine, Fr. Bernie and Fr. Marc-Eddy.

Angels Without Wings

Yes, during these days I have seen many signs of hope because the children I met have led me to meet “angels without wings”. This is the title I have chosen for my sharing with you today. I think it is a good synthesis of what I think I have learned over the past days in Haiti. The angels I'm thinking about do not have wings. They also do not have blond curly hair or funny bellies. The angels I'm thinking about can come from different countries: Canada, Madagascar, USA ... They can be black or white, but actually, the color is not the central issue. At the end of the day, these angels without wings are tired. I imagine that they sometimes even end their day discouraged, worried or upset. These angels do not last forever. When one of them has to retire, new angels arrive. These angels without wings are very similar to me and you, rather than those appearing in various Renaissance paintings. So what is so special about these “angels without wings”? They all have a compassionate heart. I realize that I have allowed my thoughts to flow freely but I hope you understand what I am saying. I hope my words can encourage you to become one of these “angels without wings.” You do not need to visit or work in Haiti. Fortunately Haiti can be with you in many ways, including through your prayers for these needy people and even by your financial support.



A Final Word of Invitation

Before ending my sharing, I want to express my sincere gratitude to the community of Our Lady of the Cape Parish and to all those who allowed me to witness and learn from these extraordinary signs of hope. Perhaps my new and profound experiences in Haiti have happened because you have been one of these angels without wings. I am glad that by the end of my visit to Haiti, I could not only see the poverty and the misery of these people; I now am lifted up by their faith, joy and unfathomable hope.

Both back in Haiti and wherever you are, there are a lot of angels without wings! If you haven't yet, why not become one yourself by supporting this important mission in Haiti with your prayers or even by your donation. It can change your heart and your life as well. It did exactly that for me!



You could continue your support of our Missions by including them in your will.

Should you wish to do so, our legal title is:

North American La Salette Mission Center, Inc.