

EDITORIAL

La Salette

VISION & MISSION



By Fr. Thomas Vellappallil, ms

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Dear Co-missioners,

Street children are only one section of the poor in the world, who need saviours and shepherds. What Jesus saw many centuries ago is still true today: "The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few." The Church needs everyone who can serve people in need. God calls every one of us to do something for the poor and needy. When others share our suffering the harsh blows of our life are softened. The changes and chances of life can be better dealt with when others join in and share the burdens. If such sharing grows to a global level there will certainly be less misery on earth. No burden is too heavy when shared by another.

"Come to me, all you are exhausted and weighed down beneath your burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls; for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Jesus invites us to take his yoke upon our shoulders for Jesus is willing to yoke with us through which our burdens become light. The burden is laid on us in love and is meant to be carried in love and love makes even the heaviest burden light. Fr. Joe Gosselin, MS shares with us the story and life of Haitian people who need someone's shoulders to yoke with. Are we willing to yoke with others who are burdened?

There is an old story which tells how a man came upon a little boy carrying a still smaller boy, who was lame, upon his back. "That's a heavy burden for you to carry," said the man. "That's not a burden," came the answer. "That is my brother." The burden which is given in love and carried in love is always light. Whatever God sends us is made to fit our needs and our abilities exactly.

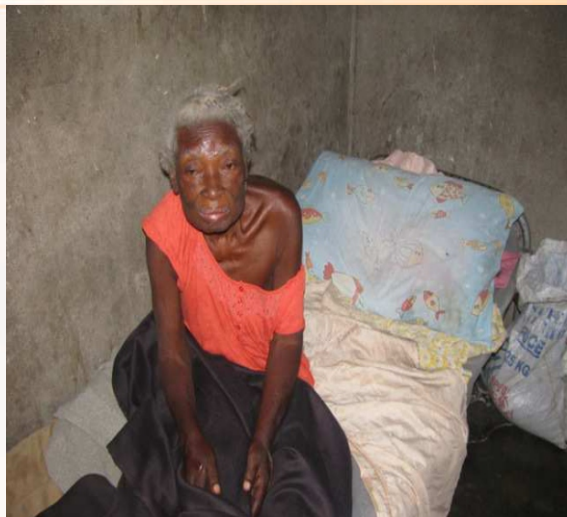


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Haitians are very peaceful. Outside of Port au Prince there is rarely any violence, although people can argue at a rather high decibel level. People don't steal; but truth can be hard to come by. Haitians are pleasant, polite, and hospitable. They are definitely religious. They are kind, extroverted, gregarious and most willing to share.

It is a wonder that after endless decades of trauma the Haitians have endured. They were the only slaves in history that had a successful revolt and in 1804 formed a new country, sixty years before Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Seeing that the Haitians were winning the war of independence Bonaparte sent 60,000 troops to subdue the revolt and his army was crushed by the army of the barefooted. Bankrupted from campaigns in Europe Bonaparte sold his most priceless asset: Louisiana and its accompanying territory to the United States, instantly doubling the size of the U.S..



Sick woman in desperate situation

90% of the population speaks only Creole but the official language used in the Capitol and by the well educated is French. This nurtures a pervasive sense of second class citizenship. In years of slavery Whites controlled the

Worship under a roofless Church





Gathered as Church

country and fathered children with their slaves. These children with lighter skin were educated, freed, and put in charge of other slaves. Through the decades lighter skin was seen as more handsome and beautiful. Religious teachings stressed the devil, sin and perdition instead of God's love. A sense of self goodness became brutally warped.

With decades of brutal dictatorships, chronic poverty, rape as a means of control, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, cholera, and immigration of their best and brightest it is a wonder how the population endures. That they do survive borders the impossible, that they survive and somehow move forward borders on the incredulous. The Haitian people are left with deep emotional scars. Outside of one's family it is hard to estab-



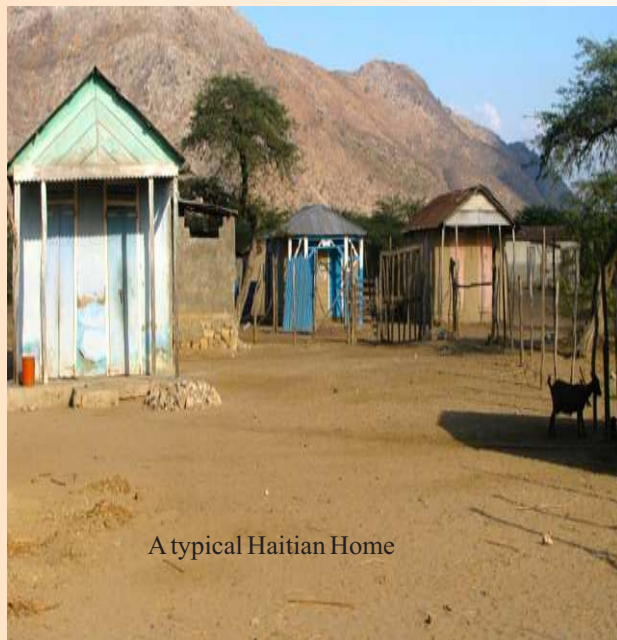
Fr. Joe visiting the sick

lish any kind of trust. People hold on tightly to anything they have, whether it be money, property or even knowledge.

Lay people conduct missions in someone's back yard or in the middle of the street. Slowly people gather as the music starts innocently enough followed by sedate religious music. When roughly a hundred people have gathered the prayer session officially starts. A warm welcome puts people at ease in their own "come to the meeting" chairs. Then the drums and brass key up and a livelier tune gets people into a singing mood. The music and dance progressively heat up. It reaches a crescendo with people singing at the top of their voices, swaying and dancing causing dust to filter upwards, backlit by the dying sun and then slowly settling back to a final stop. By this time about three hundred people have gathered. A few "quicker than you can listen" gospel messages follow, and then four or five neighborhood talents sing their favorite religious songs. The lay preacher, man or woman, reverently reads a scriptural passage and all is quiet as he or she engages the mixed bag congregation with questions to which the people naturally respond loudly with snippets of song building to a powerful verbal climax. The message is unmistakably clear, comforting and Christian. These lay preachers are untrained, but well schooled and very effective.

On the church compound there are a couple of hypoactive dogs that have free run of the church even when the congregation is assembled. One day while the priest was preaching the dogs came close to the ambo and lay very quiet. Once the homily was over they got up, yelped and barked at the top of their dog lungs and high tailed it out of church – really bad church manners. During lent on Fridays the custom is to have a two hour Way of the Cross. The first Lenten Friday the dogs positioned themselves on the floor between two separate pews with their heads sticking out into the aisle. The surprise came when the following week, at the same time as the week before; they were stationed attentively in the same spot! When Catholics choose a pew they return to it endlessly.

What does the typical Haitian country home look like? It usually has two rooms; ten by ten or twelve by twelve with dirt floors. The roof is tin. The walls are usually broken fieldstone. And if possible there is a small front porch. But here is the luxury item. Every house has a lace curtain at the entrance and one separating the two rooms. Of course it is costly but when building their



A typical Haitian Home

home, however humble, they will cut back on the expense of cement or rock for this tiny bit of luxury.

My work here is mainly visiting the sick in their hovels. Children and adults are often dressed in rags. Smells are often overpowering. Many are in darkness all day long and many are bed ridden for lack of medical care. Eye problems seem to be endemic. Many would simply need rehab but can't use walkers or wheelchairs because of the terrain. Some visits require long walks in the hills. It is often humanly revolting, but strangely satisfying for it is the suffering Christ that I am visiting. I can never forget.



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