



St. Brendan's Catholic Community
Haiti Outreach Ministry
4633 Shiloh Rd. Cumming, Georgia 30040
(770) 205-7969

Deacon Roger Fraser
rfraser@stbrendansatl.com

I wanted to share a few stories of two trips I took to Haiti in 2008 to visit the people of our sister parish Our Lady of Fatima in Bassin-Zim...they changed our attitudes and our lives.

We met the Risen Jesus in Haiti, and it was a humbling and joyous experience. It may sound strange to find joy in the midst of poverty and suffering. But the joy is not in the suffering....it is in the promise of God's blessings. There is joy in Haiti.

You may ask, "Why did you ever go to a God-forsaken place like Haiti?" The quick answer is, "to visit our sister parish Our Lady of Fatima." But we came to better appreciate that the conditions in Haiti are not what the world should be...so we have to change the world. We discovered that our trip to Haiti was a profound experience of God's love and mercy. We met angels in Haiti...We saw where you go to learn to be a saint...Our faith was tested...We praised God with the vibrant, loving and hardworking people of Notre Dame de Fatima...and I heard God's voice saying that he loves us more...much more than we imagine.

I asked, "Do they know they are poor?" "Yes," I was told, "because they can't feed their families." Inflation is high and food prices are higher. But we at St Brendan's in Cumming, GA, are making a difference in Bassin-Zim, with the resources we are sharing, especially the micro-loans, the annual budget support and the generator for the church compound. More than that, we are building a parish hall and plan to dedicate it on the Feast of St. Brendan, May 16, 2009. And, maybe...eventually...Father Meres will get his dream of a Catholic school. There is hope in Haiti.

We met angels in Haiti that took care of us every step of the way... a true Haitian renaissance man, Bernard, Father Meres, our interpreters, Bastia and Berry, our cooks, Memem and Nanush, the gatekeeper, Lebonie, to name a few. These angels kept us safe in a place where I don't know how people survive. Commonplace things for us in the United States, like drinking water or taking a taxi ride, in Haiti are missteps that can have dire consequences.

We went to the nutrition clinic that Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity run, caring for over 100 children at a time. It is the place where we can go to see God's mercy and to learn to be a saint. I saw someone scoop up into their arms a youngster no more than 2 years old...and then be told to put him down because he may have the contagious scabies itch mites. Others in our group fed the babies laying in their little cribs...some listless and puffed up from malnutrition...one with his head swollen from hydroencephalitis whimpering in his crib....but most of the 30 or so babies quietly looked at us with their big round eyes...none were smiling. I am still in awe of the good sisters and the grace of their Mother Superior.

Another day, as we were waiting to meet the people that have the micro-loans, we jumped in to help the mason and his crew to move rocks from the front of the church about 100 yards to the back of the property to build the foundation of the hut for the generator. Soon more people began helping and then there were over 20 of us hauling rocks...just talking and laughing and working... there is a real sense of community at Notre Dame de Fatima. "Father Meres, " I asked, "Isn't the generator hut very close to the voodoo priest's house? Won't the noise bother him?" " Yes," he smiled, "I think he will probably move within a month☺" [Update: on my 2nd trip, the generator proved to be so quiet that the voodoo priest didn't move...he did chant one night until midnight.]

We met a 19 year old young man named Kasly whom we recognized from daily 5:30AM Mass as a member of the choir and a drum player. Kasly lives by himself during the week and on weekends his brother stays with him. Father Meres told us that he hired Kasly to collect rocks from the fields around Bassin-Zim for the foundation of the new parish hall. It was the first paying job he ever had and he was extremely proud of the contribution he was making. You see, Kasly is blind, but he is still a grateful steward of the gifts God has given him. You should have seen his smile when I said I was going to tell the people of St. Brendan's about him. And I told him we would get him a new drum.



I have many more stories I want to tell you, but for now I have just one more. Someone recently told me that it is easy to love, but much more difficult to be loved. It is a control thing I think. It is easy for us to say to the people of Haiti, "I Love You" and send them a nice check. It wasn't so easy, I found, to be in Haiti in the least likely place, and hear God's voice very clearly saying that he loves us all. Dear God, I thought, I know you love me, but do you love these people of Haiti?

We were walking down the dusty main road in Bassin-Zim when I heard voices crying out from a yard close by, "I Love You, I Love You, I Love You." I couldn't believe my ears. This is a place where people don't speak English. "I Love You," Father Rafi and I called back, "I Love You." Nine smiling children appeared at the fence...a typical Haitian fence of cactus woven with barbed wire. "I Love You," we heard again, so I responded, "I Love You Too." The reply came, "I Love You More."

