

Deacon Roger Fraser Visit to Haiti May 2013

I was in Haiti for 6 days with fellow parishioners Anne Alexander, Ann Adams and Philippe Dumoulin. We were living the mission to be the Body of Christ as we went to visit our sister church in Bassin-Zim to celebrate with them their patron saint's feast day, Our Lady of Fatima, commemorating the anniversary 96 years ago when the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to 3 peasant youngsters in Fatima, Portugal. I have to tell you I saw many encouraging signs of improvement in Haiti, in spite of evidence of how difficult life is there and how food is in limited supply, but the most impressive were the numerous ways people were the Body of Christ to each other.

When we arrived at Our Lady of Fatima in Bassin-Zim, two things were immediately noticed. The road was recently improved; It was still rocks and gravel, but the former 45 minute trip from Hinche, now only took 15 minutes. Let me just observe with some pride that roads are not improved going to dying or dead areas of the country. Secondly, cell phone service was strong...unheard of 3 years ago when I last visited. But, it also didn't take long to recognize they still did not have a reliable water supply. Scooping from a 5-gallon bucket was necessary to bathe for a few days...it took some getting used to the uncertainty of having water when it was needed.

The feast day Mass was remarkable with the church overflowing with more than a 1000 joyous people...Bishop St. Hillien of Hinche presided with 42 priests, 8 nuns, 4 Deacons, 9 liturgical dancers, and several local dignitaries in attendance. The music was spectacular with everyone joining in...and fortunately it was recorded. With Philippe's help, I was privileged to share the Good News in a homily that emphasized while we are thousands of miles apart in Bassin-Zim, Haiti and Cumming, GA, our communities are closely linked Spiritually. [see below] And, yes Jesus is calling us to work together to be His body, the Church, helping each other.

Considering that 9 years ago Our Lady of Fatima was literally at death's doorstep, with a starving pastor who was at the mercy of local families for food to eat, the Our Lady of Fatima community is now thriving and it's transformation has been remarkable. The Parish Hall is being put to good use, not the least of which are the four school grades now in session. That week school was out for the feast, but can you imagine, 110 students, 4 teachers and the Principal met with us to do a project together....the results were shared with our children in Vacation Bible School last summer join the activity...each student traced their hand, wrote their name and identified what they wanted to be when they grew up....we linked alternated hands from OLF and St. Brendan. And, I am so very pleased to report that the foundation of Father Meres dream, the parish school, is completed and the phase 2 wall construction will begin this week! I am telling you the Holy Spirit is not letting up in our communities!

Before I finish I want to tell you one more story of how our two parishes are working together to make Bassin-Zim more self-sufficient. 4 years ago I had met a bright young farmer, Odiness, who we had provided a micro-loan to expand his chicken business. This trip we sat with him as he modestly discussed how his farm has expanded with hundreds of plantain and banana trees since his business plan was presented to the OLF parish council 2 years ago to buy two oxen. He now is ready to plant rotating crops of peanuts and peppers on another field...oh, and he has been hiring seasonal labor from neighbors in Bassin-Zim...up to 25 at a time! You see this shows us that when we bring God's love to each other, helping a little begins a process that makes a huge difference. Because we respond with the Holy Spirit's guidance and His grace, our work is blessed and multiplied!

Homily at the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima

May 12, 2013 Bassin-Zim Haiti

The Scriptures on this holy feast day of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Fatima, tell us that she is the Star of the New Evangelization and she educates us in the faith that her son Jesus is Christ the Lord...if only we are open to learn as the children in Fatima, Portugal were 96 years ago when she appeared and began to teach them.

-----*lift a bowl of sand*

If we were asked to grab as much sand out of this bowl as we could, our first instinct might be to grab it with a fist, and hold tightly as much as we can. Like this. But we quickly discover that we cannot hold very much sand in a closed fist. If we think about it, we realize we can hold more sand with an open hand. Like this. At first it is counter-intuitive, but we come to realize that an open hand holds more. The more we grab, the more sand falls out of our hands...but the more we open our hand, the more sand remains.

In the today's reading we hear about our history as people of faith. 700 years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah said that God loves us so much that He would give us a sign, a "young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel."

Emmanuel means God with us. In the Gospel, even Elizabeth and her unborn baby recognized the Lord Jesus and His mother. And what did Mary do? She praised God, opening her lowly hand to His greatness and mercy...she let go in order to receive His blessing. And, during her life when she opened her hand to let go of her son, she received more grace than ever. Our shared history as a people of faith is that we often keep closed. We hold onto the things of the past...We hold onto the hurts of the past...We hold on to our thinking of the past...but the more we think we have, the more closed we are and the less we have. So Christ comes and promises: "I lift up the lowly

and the hungry shall be filled with good things"...See what happens if we open ourselves to Him?

-----repeat in Creole

So here is the secret....Do you want to know how to get the most sand?...dig with both hands together. We can get lots of sand when two hands work together. That is the teaching of the Blessed Virgin today in her example to be open to God: the Lord wants us to be open to Him for us to do His work together. He wants us to be two hands of the Body of Christ, receiving and sharing His love with the world. As St. Paul said in the 2nd reading, God made Jesus the head of "the church, which is His body..." We are men and women, girls and boys thousands of miles apart in Bassin-Zim, Haiti and in Atlanta, Georgia...and yet we are spiritually linked. We can work with two hands together to receive God's grace. It is not enough that one of us gets saved. We are called to be saved together as a connected spiritual community. That is what Christ promised and asked you and me to be part of...to be part of His Body.

-----repeat in Creole

This is what we celebrate today: together we are willing to become part of the Body of Christ...to become new members of the Church lead by Our Lord Jesus Christ. To do so, each and every one of us had to let go of something to be here. Like the Blessed Mother, each of us had to open ourselves to receive. We had to allow the grace of God to pour upon us and refresh us. Now we join hands, and together we receive even more grace. It is not a gift given to us for ourselves alone. The grace that is given to us today is the grace that has been given to us in our Baptism...and will continue to be given even more to us, each and every time we share it with others....with two hands. It refreshes us and gives us more to share.

...together Deacon Roger's left hand and Phillipe's right hand scoop up the sand together.

There is only one problem: we need to have open hands and welcome the grace of God. It is not easy, in fact even the Church has trouble in letting go. Our Pope Francis recently let go of a tradition. On Holy Thursday he washed the feet of 12 young people in a juvenile jail...two of those people were women; even one was a Muslim. Suddenly the tradition took on new meaning and had great potential to change the world. That was an open hand of love and of grace for the world to see. That is the model of witness that we claim to be....that we need to be. So today, on this sacred feast day, we are called to let go of the past that in any way inhibits our ability to receive the grace of God. Today we are called to come to the Lord humbly with open hands, free to receive His grace...and then go out share it. Alleluia!

-----repeat in Creole

Thank You Fr. Brendan McGuire, Holy Spirit Parish, San Jose, CA, your homily opened my heart and my hands.