

January 15, 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I've been to Haiti several times and although I've seen the poverty there, I would never say that I have experienced it. Certainly, being in Haiti is different than watching scenes of Haiti on television but my trips to Haiti began in the comfort of the first world and I knew that 10 days later I would return to the security of the first world in which I live. In some sense, I *toured* Haiti's poverty the way one might visit any foreign place where one had not intention of settling.

I don't even believe I can *imagine* what it is like to live the poverty of Haiti. Born and bred in the United States, I can't imagine living in a country whose history is oppression, political violence and poverty. I can't imagine living in a place where hunger and homelessness are everywhere. I remember thinking, while in Haiti, that you can always drive through the very poorest neighborhoods in the U.S. into more comfortable neighborhoods. In Haiti, you never drive beyond the poverty: it is around you, beside you, behind you and before you.

My connection to Haiti is largely through the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation whose primary mission is health care. Because of that connection I have seen the best and the worst of health care in Haiti - and I have seen its absence.

I'm on vacation this week, visiting my sister and brother-in-law in Colorado. I'm staying in their comfortable home where I have much more time than usual to watch the unfolding story of the earthquake in Port au Prince, on my choice of two televisions or my lap-top. In a real sense, we are able to *tour* the experience of the Haitian people without ever leaving our living rooms. As I watch the video of buildings falling and trapping people, of people running in the streets in clouds of dust, of bodies of victims shrouded and lined up in the streets, I try -and fail- to understand how the Haitians absorb this latest insult to their dignity as human beings, sons and daughters of God.

And in the last word of the previous paragraph lies the greatest mystery of all: God. God has no desire to punish his especially beloved, the poorest of the poor - and yet we call this a natural disaster. We all grapple with the "Why?" of this catastrophe - and at least for believers, that simple question, "Why?" is a cry to the Creator.

But a greater *God-mystery* threads through this week's story. And that is the mystery of the faith of the people of Haiti.

I remember asking in Haiti, "How do people keep their faith after living for generations in such dire circumstances?" The answer came right back: "When God is *all* you have, you do not let go of your faith."

When God is all you have, you do not let go of your faith...

How often do we get that backwards? How often do we place our faith in the things we have and, when we lose them, question if God is still with us? Yet here are people who have lost all and cling to God and faith as their most beloved possessions.

Just a few minutes ago, I saw video of hundreds of Haitians processing through the streets of Port au Prince singing hymns and clapping their hands. The commentator mentioned that all through the night you could hear groups of people throughout the city gathering and singing together...

When God is all you have, you do not let go of your faith...

The faithful Haitian people are human beings. This week we've seen them bleed and die; we've heard their cries of anguish, their weeping over the loss of loved ones; we've seen them beg for something to eat, something to drink, for a place to go... but they know in Jesus a God who chose to suffer with his people and they believe their God is with them...

When God is all you have, you do not let go of your faith...

Don't for a moment think that I'm trying to "spiritualize" the plight of Haitians this week. Their loss and pain are real, as real as their faith in God -and conversely- their faith in God is real, as real as their loss and pain.

If anything, we may be the ones in need of a deeper spirituality in the face of this tragedy.

The financial support we can offer obliges us to give and to give generously but in addition to that assistance, we can be with the people of Haiti in their prayer. The distinction here is subtle but important: rather than pray *for* the Haitian people, we might do well to pray *with* them... pray for an end to the suffering, an end to the poverty, an end to the chaos before violence enters in - and the beginning of a new day for these beloved people of God.

You can be sure that our brothers and sisters in Haiti are praying even as you read this words. We can join in their prayer and we can give to support the years of work ahead for Haiti and its people.

You had an opportunity at Mass this weekend to make a contribution to the relief effort through the work of the Saint Boniface Haiti Foundation.

If you want to make another contribution or know of others looking for a place to give, please go to **www.HaitiHealth.org** or send a check to

**Saint Boniface Haiti Foundation
400 North Main
Randolph, MA 02368**

or send your donation to the parish office made out to St. Boniface Haiti Foundation and we will forward it for you.

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming

For more information and for suggestions for praying, please visit my blog at:
www.ConcordPastor.blogspot.com