

A Small Journey to Haiti - Fr. Hernan Astudillo, March 2010

On January 12th, 2010, the land shook her hips, leaving thousands of people from Haiti in complete desperation, like the earthquakes on January 13th and February 13th of 2001 in El Salvador, or the earthquake on August 15th of 2007 in Peru. Haiti is a land of material of poverty but finally, it has now come to the attention of the world in order to build the bridge of solidarity.

San Lorenzo, a small Hispanic Anglican Parish located at the corner of Dufferin and Wenderly Drive, decided to once again, 'cook a bread of solidarity' as we always do, calling to our community of communities (the 20 countries of Latin American). We called on everybody and the people brought generously - money (we managed to raise \$31,500), empanadas, pupusas, and other traditional food from their country which we sold and converted it into the 'holy bread of solidarity'. All of this was made possible through radiothons on our radio station, CHHA Radio Voces Latinas 1610AM, the first Hispanic community radio station in Canada. Having in our daily journey many people who suffered the same experiences in their countries of origin, been a people in the diaspora, it is very important to share and build the 'language of resistance' and the solidarity with our sisters and brothers in need.

On February 18th of 2010, I left for Haiti. My first stop was in Atlanta and later in Puerto Plata (Dominican Republic). Delta Airlines lost my luggage in Atlanta, but it did not stop my journey. The next day, February 19th, an angel from Puerto Plata drove me to the capital of the Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo and around 9.00am I left for Haiti. Two young people were waiting for me at the airport. Remember, this is my first time in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, with no French and Creole.

Moments latter, we arrived at the Spiritans priest, Father Joseph Phillipe in the city of Port-au-Prince. Port-au-Prince is complete destroyed. Fr. Joseph invited me to have a cup of coffee and later he let me to go and visit the city. I had the opportunity to see what was left of the government palace, the Catholic Cathedral, the Anglican Cathedral - the church of pain, many churches, houses, and government buildings have collapsed. The people are living on the streets - some of them have tents, others plastic tents and others are using the sheets in order to make their homes. Beside the tents. are tape recorders or CDs with an African Haitian music with a high volume noise. The dogs, pigs, children, youth and everybody walking in different directions.

There is not a corner were you can start. Saturday 20th February, I had the opportunity to meet people from other countries, university teachers, community leaders expressing the importance to rebuild Fondwa a community located two hours between Paort--au-Prince and Jacmel. We finished the meeting around 5.00 pm, then they asked to me if I needed anything. "Yes, please can you give me the opportunity to go and pray at one of the places where many of my sisters and brothers from Haiti are buried?", I asked.

They took me to the area called Titanyen. In this place, 70,000 people are buried! it is one of the six places were a total of 250, 000 victims of the devastating earthquake are buried. I feel the presence of the spirits and taken the lessons from my Ecuadorian Bishop, Monsignor Luis Alberto Luna Tobar. I cried with my heart. I learnt to cry from inside during my prayers in silence kneeling beside a big stone, where it is written a prayer in Creole. Moments later, we witnessed a truck coming and

stopping 50 metres from us. Immediately, they started making a hole in the earth and the truck start dumping more bodies into the hole. It reminded me of the Holocaust. No words in my mouth - only tears and silence! Fr. Joseph's assistant was beside me, crying and asking, "Please Fr. Hernan, give them a blessing". With a knot in my throat, I did. After that, complete silence all the way back to the tent where I was sleeping.

Sunday 21: Taking the route to Fondwa, it is crazy - too many curves going up and down in the high mountains for two hours. Finally we arrived at the town called *Tom Gato*. Later we walked through the mountains down to the convent of *Sisters of St. Anthony* which was completely destroyed. Beside the convent, we saw two little portions of land where a little orphan and a nun, who were killed during the earthquake, are buried. We also visited the agriculture cooperative of the peasants from *Fondwa*, the community center, the radio station, the bakery, the restaurant and the credit union bank. I had a good time with the children from the orphanages as we played soccer. All the people from the countryside are living under the plastic tents.

Today is Monday 22, 4:39am: the land is shaking again. Everybody is screaming, nervous and some of them crying. Nobody wants to go back to the tents and people are sleeping outside. During the day, you can see the presence of the Canadian military helping the people, the Venezuelan, USA military and the presence of UN - all of them working hard in order to provide the assistance to everybody in need. If you have a chance to sit, meditate and do a small moment of discernment, you will discover: "In the world, there is enough food, clothes, land and human resources to build and rebuild any part of the world which is in crisis. But the worst earthquakes we have in this time, is the human selfishness, the egocentrics, the materialism accumulated in the heart of many institutions (government and religious) who like to bend to the god of money. This is manifested in the wars, in the corporations, hunger, the destruction of the creation and the exclusion of the most poor people. We are ignoring the God of life, which is manifested in the wisdom, faith, hope and love of different religions".

In spite of all the darkness, pain and sad moments, you can see, feel and have a complete trust! Haiti is a holy place of hope! You can let to penetrate in your heart the wonderful light of the children's eyes. Even if they cry, they also have a pure spark of hope. You can see a deep smile of seniors expressing a holy prayer from their experience. The life becomes a daily prayer and the prayer a bread of life. You can see the encouragement of youth in their strong commitment and the tired hands of the adults planting the future for all.

A heartfelt thank you to all those who supported this noble cause of raising funds for Haiti - from the community to the business people. from the media to the sports and cultural clubs, both within the Hispanic and Canadian communities.