



**"Fasting is a great help to avoid sin and all that leads to it" Benedict XVI**

**Making Social Justice happen** As the Social Teaching of the Church is considered for many to be "the best kept secret" for Catholics; we also ignore very often how people very close to us have been living in the light of that "secret". Today we start a series of relates to present some of the experiences of the people that make Social Justice to happen.

I was asked to share some of what I did in Africa for my seven years there, so here are a few brief thoughts. I first spent 4 months in Sierra Leone as a sabbatical after I was ordained 11 years. This was before all the fighting there and the blood diamonds, but it was already one of the top three poorest countries in the world, e.g. only 50% of births reaching age 5 and food was what you grew or killed. There I saw how people could live without so many of the things we consider "necessary," but I also saw how traditional values have a good and bad side, e.g., absolute belief in God and the importance of our ancestors and the role of leaders to provide for their people, but also they accepted killing of people to get "power" or to get rid of "witches." Roads, utilities – electricity, water, sewage – were virtually non-existent, but people were very caring and friendly. But I also had to learn that clock time as I knew it did not exist there. Then I was a Maryknoll Associate priest from 1990 to 1997 in Tanzania – also one of the 10 poorest countries in the world. There many of my initial perceptions of the "third world" were reinforced. For example, the importance of the now and the past, since the future was so uncertain; the focus on the group and surviving vs. our western North American focus on individualism and choices; and the values of belief in God, tradition, and rituals. I saw again how dependent people are on things like the weather and therefore the importance of seeking "power" over these elements and especially anything that led to evil in their lives. What seemed like passivity from my perspective, seemed to be more a limitation of resources and skills.

Food could be sparse, but also abundant at feasts and special celebrations – there were markets though with some food and products for sale; medicine was not available or only to the rich or those who could bribe to get it; education was by memorizing (related to the importance of tradition) and not at all like our western scientific, questioning approach; males were in charge, children were second class citizens ("do what they were told") and women were third class – take care of and provide for the rest and have children, boys especially. Rites of passage were still very important, which included circumcision of the boys and girls; elders, ancestors and the traditions of the past that worked for them then were still most important now; and the "evil eye" or wish was as bad or worse than evil acts; things were never done directly, but only indirectly (e.g. one never caused or even did something, rather it happened). The "wild" animals were over in the Serengeti, but plenty of smaller creatures were deadly like snakes, etc.

I lived in a large village – Sirari – and the parish covered 17 other villages. On Sunday we had masses in 4 stations/churches. Every week the Small Christian Communities led by a catechist would meet and once a month we tried to visit them. Traveling for us (I was usually working with another local priest) was by motorcycle or pick-up truck, for the people it was be feet or for the richer, by bicycle. There was no electricity, unless one had a generator – the rectory had solar panels, so no refrigeration and cooking with wood and charcoal and rain water or streams were our source of water. In droughts the water could be very brown and deadly. Phone connections could take a whole day and mail a month, so most rectories had short wave radios to keep in touch. Homes were made out of sticks (waddle) and long grass (thatch) or for some burnt bricks and aluminum sheets for roofing. People grew, mostly by hand (although there were some plows that cows pulled), their own food (millet, sorghum, cassava) and some crops to sell – in my area it was mostly corn and a little coffee.

The Diocese had about 25 parishes and was 5% Catholic, 5% Protestant, and the rest Traditional Religion. Polygamy was a given and probably the biggest reason there weren't more Catholics. Most marriages were arranged and a dowry of cows was the usual. Here most weddings were for women about 16/17 years old (in Sierra Leone most if you weren't married by 14 you were old), but the men were usually in their mid-20's, because they had to raise the dowry of cows – an expensive proposition in some cases. So cattle's stealing was not uncommon. The people I lived with were Abakuria (but their real identity was to their clan), but Kiswahili was the national language. So that is what we spoke and said Mass in. I enjoyed my time there and would have stayed longer, but the Archbishop told me I had to come home, so I did after my about 6 years there. I had spent almost 6 months at Maryknoll and 4 months in language school preparing before I went to the parish and then did a few months returned mission program before I came back to the Archdiocese. And now I am here! **By: Rev. William Stanfield (Fr. Bill) Vice-Rector of Saint Francis de Sales Seminary.**



CRN Coffee met

Monday March 30<sup>th</sup> night to discuss the Bishops document, "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope." The discussion was led by Juan Manuel. Juan explained that the document states that countries have the right to guard their borders but at the same time they cannot turn away refugees who are escaping unjust situations whether they are legal or illegal immigrants. The document states that if economic opportunity is not available in one's own country that person has the right to seek opportunity elsewhere since the goods of the earth belong to everyone, not a particular country. In light of this countries must work to ensure that people do have the proper means to ensure economic opportunity.

From a spiritual perspective we will be judged on how we treat the most vulnerable. Immigrants who have left there home to go into an unfamiliar land are obviously very vulnerable however; the public seems to be unable to see immigrants as vulnerable. Too often immigrants are looked at with suspicion, they don't all speak English, they don't all have insurance, and the perception is that their looking to make a quick buck and then leave. These types of beliefs are very ignorant on the part of Americans. It was mentioned that the process of getting in to the United States is not easy. People who get across the border have to endure severe hardships to do so. The fact that so many people are willing to take extreme measures to get to the United States illustrates just how bad the conditions must be in their native country. Immigrants are not, "gold diggers" but good people who are striving to create a better life for their families. Immigrants are often victims of economic injustices in their own country that give them no other choice but to go elsewhere in order to sustain themselves.

There are a couple of pastoral challenges the document mentions concerning immigration. The first challenge concerns the damage done to the family. The result of immigration is that families are split between two countries. This reality makes immigrants and their families back home all the more vulnerable. The document suggests that parishes should offer Spanish masses if capable, and seminarians should pursue learning a second language to help immigrants feel more welcome. Ultimately we need to strive to look at immigrants with the eyes of Jesus, not seeing the differences but seeing their example of what it means to leave everything behind for the good of others. (By: Matthew Widder)

**OPERATION RICE BOWL.** Why does 25 percent of the money raised remain in the diocese? Catholic Relief Services believes that the 25 percent of Operation Rice Bowl contributions remaining in the dioceses affirms the importance of our global responsibility as Christians to assist those in need both around the corner and around the world.

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There is a special place by the Outer Commons to drop off your donations. ***Please send us an email if you have any furniture to donate!!!***

***CRN COFFEE!!!*** Will be meeting at room 200 on Monday April 20, 2009 from 7:00 to 7:45 PM. Everyone is invited! The discussion will verse on work social issues! (More details to come)