

Come all ye faithful...come to Bethlehem

Come to Bethlehem and Find Jesus:

December, 2015

Bethlehem where Jesus came into the world is in the Holy Land, right? Would you think it strange if I said Bethlehem is in Haiti and it is where Jesus is present in the world today? I visited Bethlehem in the Holy Land almost two years ago. I visited Bethlehem in Haiti last month. Let me explain.

Together with eight volunteers, I travelled to the Missionaries of the Poor (MOP) Good Shepherd Monastery in Cap-Haitien, Haiti in November. The MOP Brothers' compound has four residences for the poor. One home, called "Bethlehem", houses 40 infants, toddlers and young boys and girls living with moderate to very severe developmental disabilities, many with contractures. Most need help with all activities of daily living, such as eating, bathing, dressing and toileting. Many cannot talk. We provided such care for a week while the brothers and staff provide it 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Peter, a volunteer, fed Jesus daily in the person of Katherine, a teenager with Cerebral Palsy (CP). Katherine cannot stand or even sit by herself. Peter had to leave before us and so I took on feeding Katherine. After lunch like Peter did before he left I wheeled Katherine about the compound in her special wheelchair singing the few French songs I knew, eliciting an occasional smile.

Jesus sat on my lap for an hour at a time in the person of 8 year old Theresa occasionally flip flopping between me and volunteer Linda. Theresa could not talk but would make sounds and was happy to snuggle, holding tight around my or Linda's neck. Theresa gave an occasional smile as I sang to her or caressed her back. As I entered the nursery on my second day there, I saw Theresa standing in her crib. She gave me a smile and stretched out her hands to be picked up.

When not working with Theresa, Linda fed other children and polished their nails. She also fed elderly residents at the Brothers' Nursing Home and trimmed their nails. I gave Jesus shaves at that home in the persons of several dozen men, kneeling down for some, bending over some and sitting on the floor for some for which Jesus thanked me in French, English and Creole.

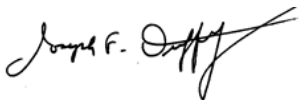
Steve, another volunteer, knows the face of Jesus well from his visits over the years, but none better than nine year olds Roman and Marcel. Roman has CP and severe contractures requiring assistance with all activities of daily living. He smiles continuously for the hours Steve spends with him each day, always in the company of Marcel who helps push Roman's wheelchair and is Roman's self-appointed protector. Marcel is small for his age and has neurological deficits as a result of no prenatal care and malnourishment as an infant. These Jesuses' smiles sometimes bring tears of joy to Steve.

Agnes, one of our volunteers, comforted Jesus in the person of Robenson, a teenager, who though he is at peace with the knowledge of his terminal illness, was self-conscious about appearing publicly with jaundiced eyes. Jesus looks cool in sunglasses.

Courtney, another volunteer, sponsors Yvens. She sees the kind and loving face of Jesus in Yvens. Courtney had sent a gift package for Yvens with another volunteer team. Not only did Yvens share the gum and candy from the package with fellow residents but as Yvens was about to eat the last two pieces he saw a friend that had none and so shared a piece with him.

We helped Jesus (in the person of Dr. Eugene Maklin, a Family Practitioner) get the power steering on his truck fixed. Can you imagine driving a truck on U.S. roads without power steering? The roads in Haiti are narrow, winding, hilly, often potholed and generally crowded with pedestrians, other cars, bicycles and motorcycles. Dr. Maklin serves six clinics and makes frequent house calls 24/7. Jesus needs power steering.

This Christmas look for Bethlehem in your community. Find Jesus in need, even just one person, and/or, let Bethlehem find you. You may see someone in need as you go about your day, read about someone in need in the paper or on the internet, hear about it at church or from a neighbor. Find your Bethlehem or let it find you, and meet Jesus. Now that will be a very blessed Christmas!



Joe Duffy, Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Paterson

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