

Dear Friends,

Gaudete, in Domino semper!  
Rejoice in the Lord, always!

These words that begin mass today, the third Sunday of Advent, give rise to the name "Gaudete Sunday". Today is unusual in that it is one of only two Sundays of the year where the priest wears pink vestments.

Since the normal color for both advent and lent is purple, (for contrition, wounded ness and preparation), we well might consider pink a "softer purple." It's not the gold or white of the usual rejoicing, but rather there still is an element of the drudgery. And yet a happy escape from it too. "Christmas is close, the Savior is near, take a moment to breath, don't weaken."

I am up earlier than planned, at 1 am, because off the death of a child in our cholera camp. Our camp is called "St Philomena", after Sister Philomena Perreault who helped us in Haiti for so many years. As we light the pink candle of the advent wreath in a few more hours, we will also remember one more life that was snuffed out by a dreadful disease and the tears and crying of the mother. We are all the poorer for this death, for every death.

Purple is also a part of the black and blue of the healing injury, the bleed under the skin. It's a good color to represent the people of Haiti this year who have received more than their fair share of life's blows.

Back to our camp. You have to try to imagine the 16 huge tents, spread out on gravel, extension chords bringing feeble power everywhere. Two washing machines under a tent, filled by buckets, dumping into a big dug hole, wash endless loads of sheets stained with deadly diarrhea. Twenty to thirty people a day are carried in, floppy bodies, by hook or by crook, even in these days of riots they somehow break through barricades. Rivers of Ringers Lactate flow through our endless tubing to revive them. Most do well. In fact, of almost 900 people who have come to us sick, only 15 have died of cholera. This is sad, yet we are encouraged that most people by far have fought and done well. None of our staff have contracted choler after these many weeks of intense work, not have we tracked it into our St Damien or St Luke hospital.

Still, our supplies run out, we can't manage too much on site for emergencies, resuscitation, special medicines or tests, tension run high, tight nerves in strained doctors and patients make for a good bit of drudgery. But, we put Tang in our rehydration drinks, a Christmas tree and other lights try to make the nights a little festive, we have a big TV for those who are able to sit up and watch it and forget life for a while, and we try to keep everyone supplied with wonderful Christmas presents: a bar of soap, some toothpaste, a toothbrush, a towel.

I mentioned in a previous message the many medical challenges: the pregnant woman with cholera, the baby born in a cholera tent, the patients with heart disease who need loads of fluid fast and whose hearts can't handle it. We had another unusual challenge: a prisoner with cholera was brought at midnight. The police wanted us to handcuff him

to his cot. We refused. It is cruel to cuff a sick patient to a hospital bed. Crueler still to chain someone with massive diarrhea to a bed.

So the police kept watch instead. During the following afternoon, the prisoner said to the police he had to go down to the toilettes, and off he went with his hospital gown and carrying his IV bag high in the air. And he kept going, and going...and that was that, right out the gate. He escaped in a hospital gown with his IV in hand.

You have read of the riots these days. I spent two afternoons in the middle of them, driving around town picking up people we needed to help us. Imagine the problems riots bring in addition to being riots. You have 16 portable toilettes for cholera-diarrhea and the honey truck can't pass through the streets to empty them. It's not pretty. You doctors and nurses can't get to work. Stores are closed for days, in case you need more toilette paper, soap, laundry detergent, food, Tang, or cash.

The way we got around the city was something. I made an arrangement with 20 thugs, for a day's pay. They were leaders in the riots in our part of the city. Three went ahead of my truck on motorcycles, and 17 rode with us in the back. We drove through the burning and barricaded city, while they pushed barricades out of the way and tangled with anyone who tried to stop us. It worked so well, I also did it the next day. It's how we got essential staff to the hospital and the tents. Needless to say from the burning tires and debris we were covered with soot, so hard to get out that even after three showers we looked like we were wearing mascara.

As if this weren't trying enough, the skies turned gray for two days, and drizzled lightly, not enough to put out the fires but enough that our hundred of washed sheets wouldn't dry. And when the sun finally did come out, so did small hornets, by the thousands, and they covered us. Sounds unbelievable, but it's true. Ask Patty Rowland, who is back for a second round of 10 days to help at St Philomena.

Purple? Yes.  
Just the right color.  
Pick today?  
Yes, very welcome.

Gaudete? Rejoice?  
Yes, We still find the way.  
I trust you do too.  
Hope is the key, and it really does spring eternal.

As always, count on our thanks and prayers, in exchange for yours. Thanks for the help that keeps us going and not doing too badly. Merry Christmas as it gets very near.

Fr Rick Frechette CP