

What Family Means During Lent

Dear friends,

Lent is meant to be a heavy time. The dark of winter, the recognition of sin and personal failing, the seeking of penance and self-discipline. This takes place during the period of the sun lengthening to full light at spring, which is the rich symbol of the victory of light in resurrection. Our lent begins with three heavy darkness's.

We have retrieved the bodies of Mikhael, Delourdes and Ronald Ferdinand (the siblings of former orphans and NPFS employee Joseph). They currently are lying in our hospital chapel for burial today at St. Helene. These have been very emotional days for us, especially for Joseph and his older brother Dodo. Yesterday at mass, the chapel was packed with former orphans, crying and comforting, showing that the family bonds we have tried to instill are real, and are clearly seen when it counts. We stood before their lifeless bodies without words, with nothing but each other and our faith, hope and love. These really heal and give courage. It is amazing to see it as a true and deep dynamic. Father Wasson's intuitions and instincts were right about the ability of a community to form a family.

Four other former orphans were arrested yesterday in separate incidences, two by Haitian police during a small rice distribution. The police assumed them to be thieves of the rice and the usual unfairness ensued. They were liberated only when the police themselves became beneficiaries of most of the rice.

Two others were arrested by US military when the bus they were on as passengers hit a wagon. We still cannot understand why they were chosen as the culprits. One was handcuffed and beaten.

I mention this because before both injustices these youths were so clear about right and wrong, fairness and corruption and they are balanced in their views about how to handle it. Rejecting offers from others to inflame it on the radio, they came to "dad", (me) as they said, to try to talk and figure it out.

I so admire their equilibrium and their refusal to be treated unfairly and this led to long discussions about how to proceed. But it also led to longer discussions about the importance of not internalizing the incident. In other words, fighting the tendency that victims many times have of feeling that for some reason they deserved what had happened. I admire their desire to have "dad" help figure it out and deal with it.

The third incident was also remarkable. A young woman was brought to our hospital in labor. Her mother, father and husband were killed in the earthquake and she didn't want to deliver the baby. She kept crying and screaming out to the baby..... "Don't come out! Don't come out! Stay where you are. This is no place for you. It's no place for anyone!"

Literally she fought the delivery. The Italian midwife volunteers tried to help her. Instead of pushing during contractions, she would suck up a deep breath and draw pressure away from her pelvis telling everyone to leave her alone, begging the baby not to come out into such a world.

The Italian midwives were crying, begging the mother to believe life was good. Begging to see the child and welcome the child. They were midwives not just of the baby but of the mother's soul. After 12 hours of resisting labor, then came the little baby and a mother with a new but faint twinkle in her eye.

It makes me shudder.

Let us thank God for the power of family during lent and for the powerful reality that with even no blood or cultural ties we can really be family to each other.

Fr. Rick Frechette