

Working with God in Jamaica—2010

Last year, 16 of us from Immaculate Heart of Mary church in Abbottstown, PA went to Kingston, Jamaica to work with the Brothers of the Missionaries of the Poor. This year I was the only one able to make the pilgrimage. This is my report of the trip.

Saturday evening, I checked the hurricane tracker on the Internet. It appeared that hurricane Tomas was heading straight for Kingston! The expected arrival was on Thursday, midway through my stay there.

Sunday morning 10/31

I arrived at the airport 2 hours ahead of my 6:10AM departure, but they don't tell you that the ticket counter doesn't open till 4:30! The TSA x-ray people had a question about all the batteries in my backpack (about 100) – these were for Br. Ramil's needs.

On the plane from Miami, I filled out the Jamaican customs forms and declared the medicines and ointments that I was carrying in my 2nd suitcase (cost about \$580US per Br. John Paul's request for needs). When going through Customs, the Inspector would not let them in without a Certificate from the Ministry of Health which I didn't have. It did not matter to her whether they were for MOP and/or donated by a church group. She made a list of all of the drugs, asking me how many of this...etc. I had a printed list, but she had to make her own. During my stay, Brother John Paul was getting the paperwork in order and he eventually received all of them.

There were quite a few other visitors from other places, so the guest house at Prince of Peace was set up for women only, and the men slept in the 2nd floor dorm with the brothers. I was surprised to see two young girls (about 17 years old) with the other women guests. They explained they had been there for about 3 weeks, and were in the early stages of discernment for religious life.

At 5PM Sunday we started with Evening Prayer in the chapel, then Rosary at 6PM and dinner afterward. Night Prayer is at 9PM, lights out by 10PM. Ah, the monastery life style again!

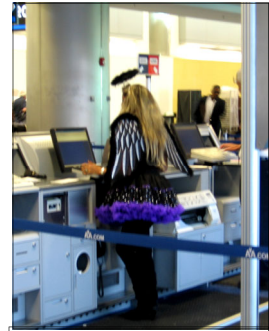
My bed in the dorm was covered with mosquito netting, and there was ceiling fan nearby running on high, so no bites this year!

Monday Morning: Bells ring at 5:30, and off to the chapel for 5:45 Mass and Morning Prayer. This (Monday) was All Saints. The homilist Fr. Bruno(?) gave an excellent homily. I have it recorded and will be available with the other trip recordings soon. (Go to www.rcwainwright.com).

My first day's work was at the Good Shepherd Apostolate. We gave haircuts, shaves, helped with feeding and cleanup. A fellow in a wheelchair (Sheldon) came zooming up and said **"I remember you!"** Many of the residents were familiar (including the young man who always punches). One thing was different this year: we went to and from the apostolates in vans instead of the "chicken trucks".

Tuesday morning's mass (All Souls' Day) was celebrated by Father Rolando, and he gave an excellent homily on Purgatory. (also recorded).

On Tuesday I went to Lord's House – women and HIV residents. I recognized Ivy in her wheelchair, and surprised her by remembering her name (from pictures – I had not been there before). My first job was to help squeegee the cleaning water from the dining area and move the tables (very heavy) back into the area. Then I spent time with some of the HIV men – most were just sitting around. One told me of his children (one in Boston and another in CA). Why aren't they taking care of him? Leah, a visiting RN from Wisconsin, was also working there and we tried to help a young girl who is probably deaf, mostly blind and pretty much uncontrollable. I tried to hold her while Leah checked her ear (which was obviously bothering the girl). That was the only time I was concerned about my safety (being bitten). Nothing was visible – when medical staff comes around they will have to sedate her for examination.



Some airline employees got into the Halloween mood early

There were a number of Brothers from the MOP sites around the world. A General Chapter meeting was taking place, deciding issues and planning for the future of the Order. Tuesday afternoon we were introduced to Fr. Benedict Worey from New Jersey, who was visiting to help Fr. Ho Lung and the Chapter meeting with Papal liaison issues.

Our usual routine was to shower and do laundry after returning to the monastery, before Evening Prayer. At least one day, the water pressure was so low that we had just a trickle. No problem—this was my introduction to “bucket showers”- a bucket to collect the trickle and a small pitcher to douse yourself!

Tuesday evening I called the home of my Goddaughter, Colleen Millanese. She happened to answer the phone, recognized my voice and we had a delightful conversation. I learned she would be at mass at the Beatitudes chapel on Sunday, we would meet then.

Father Benedict offered Mass Wednesday morning, another excellent homily directed toward the Brothers, and their life of sacrifice and service. The most memorable quote: “We pray for patience, but God doesn’t give us patience; He puts us in a situation where we can LEARN patience.”

I worked at Faith Center on Wednesday. There were many of the same faces as last year, with Jesse, Roger & Jason. As last year, work involved helping with dining area cleanup, feeding, haircuts and toweling off and dressing men. Biggest challenge was the limited number of shorts and shirts available. At one point there were no shorts left, and I thought for an instant that I could have given him the ones I was wearing, (I had another pair back at the monastery- but travel would have been a problem!) Eventually one of the brothers got some dry shorts off the line in the laundry area. I had a chance to play some Frisbee with Roger, as I did last year.



Jason at Faith Centre

When I returned to the monastery, Fr. Charles saw me and asked if I had met Brother Joseph about music. He arranged this. Brother Joseph asked if I could help him with a singing group to pick out voices for parts, but that never came together. Instead he asked if I could transcribe music into written form for vocals, piano and guitar. He downloaded the Caribbean Christmas tracks into my Zoom recorder so I could hear this (and take along home).

Thursday morning I spent the morning listening and beginning to get notes on paper. (lucky me- the other men went to Holy Innocents construction work and spent time smoothing a wall using cinder blocks for sanding!).

Thursday was a short day at the apostolates – everyone was back by 2PM. There was to be a special mass and dinner – the conclusion of the General Chapter Meeting. When everyone had gathered at Corpus Christi monastery, we recited the Rosary at the tombs of the martyred brothers. And it started to rain, (Hurricane Tomas was coming near). The mass and dinner were packed and very special. I had a chance to meet Barry Swan whom John Ruddy and I “roomed with” last year. Barry was engaged in teaching church history to the novices.



Rosary at tombs of martyred Brothers

Finally we started on our way up to the Mount Tabor Retreat Center. When we arrived the wind was blowing hard, with rain seeping in onto the floor through the closed louvers. No problem, the beds were warm and dry.

Friday morning, 6:30 wakeup, 7AM mass with Fr. Ho Lung. The first of his retreat talks was at that mass. The retreat was a silent retreat, including meals and meditation times. It continued to rain and blow. Tomas decided to turn away from Kingston, but we were on the edge of the storm. Again mid-afternoon was shower time... the mountain spring water is even colder than Kingston!

There was time for individual confessions, Rosary, Adoration, Evening Prayer, dinner, and finally Night Prayer.

Saturday 6:30 wakeup, 7AM mass, and further retreat talks and silent meditation with Fr. Ho Lung.

Sunday morning we started same times, with talk by Fr. Ho Lung. After breakfast, I went down the hill to the Beatitudes Chapel to meet Colleen. I left the retreat center with a sweatshirt on, but suddenly the wind died down and the sun came out! Fr. Rolando had just started mass and I went in to the back row. Colleen turned around, saw me and greeted me warmly.



And the rains came down!



Traffic on the road to the Beatitudes Chapel

During the sign of peace, everyone walks around and greets others. I had noticed one of the young girls was with Albert, a boy from the Beatitudes apostolate, who I held (and he held me tightly) last year. I walked over, and as soon as he spotted me, he wanted to be held – and I did through the rest of mass. **(See, they do remember you!)**

Near the end of mass, I noticed Colleen and some other teens leaving through the side door of the chapel. Fr. Rolando introduced them and they came back and performed a liturgical dance in white robes! Very impressive!



Albert from Beatitudes Center

I was able to spend a few minutes with Colleen, we exchanged gifts, took a picture (just as the camera batteries were dying), and I had to get back up to the retreat center and off to the airport.

The trip home was ok, except for car trouble at 3AM with the car I had borrowed to take to the airport, but that's another story!



Crucifix from IHM (last year)



Liturgical Dance (Colleen on right)



Colleen

Results of the trip:

- Our church donated over \$1600 for medicines and other items needed by the Brothers.
- Our church donated about 10 boxes of supplies, to be sent to Jamaica soon.
- Through me, Immaculate Heart of Mary Church continued to support the work of the Brothers among the poorest of the poor in Jamaica.

This trip was even better for me personally than last year's for a couple of reasons:

- I was by myself, so I reached out to others instead of being part of a group.
- I knew more of what to expect in the various situations than last year.
- I was so glad to see Colleen again.
- I am eager to get to MOP Jamaica again.

Putting this into perspective:

Living and working with the Brothers is a 'dual track' experience:

- You come closer to God through prayer
- You come closer to God through service

Missionaries of the Poor is a 'safe portal' for us into the life of service to the poorest of the poor. The Brothers are well organized and keep us safe in an environment far from **anything** we have ever experienced before.

My challenge is to evangelize more parishioners to take this opportunity on the next trip.

How about you?

PS: I have the three good homilies from the morning masses and all 5 of Fr. Ho Lung's talks recorded and available as mp3 files on my web site www.rcwainwright.com