

Mission to Uganda

By Nancy Greenhaw

We began the priests' retreat on Sunday although most of the priests had not arrived. After finishing their Sunday duties they traveled long distances to get here. In addition to Uganda there were priests from Burundi, Sudan, Rwanda, and the Congo, totaling 360. Some traveled within the country of Uganda in very dangerous areas where different tribes have killed seminarians, priests and sisters. These men are very brave.

We were very pleased to work with Fr. Francis Martin, a well known scripture scholar and long time friend of Renewal Ministries. Bishop Joseph Bagobiri from Nigeria also joined our team, as well as Peter Herbeck, the Vice President and Director of Missions for Renewal Ministries. During the day the priests heard talks by Peter, the Bishop and Fr Francis. Every evening we ministered to the priests, but on the first night we stopped early because these men wanted to watch the 2010 World Cup final. They have watched all the games up to this game, and soccer is very big in all of Africa.

Bishop Joseph began Monday with a talk on "Constancy in Communion". Throughout the week the bishop spoke on four major themes: faithfulness in communion to God, faithfulness in fellowship, faithfulness with the Father, and faithfulness in suffering. Afterwards there was an hour of meditation and reflection on the talk followed by a time of fellowship, and then the Eucharistic Celebration. It was an amazing sight to see 360 priests celebrating Mass together. Following Mass there was lunch and meditation.



At 4:15 PM Fr. Martin began his marvelous talks, all based on the passages in the Pastoral letters of 1st and 2nd Timothy. The crown jewel of the each day came at 6:30 when Jesus visited us in the Eucharist Adoration at evening prayer. Every evening at after supper we were able to minister to these wonderful holy men through teaching and prayer.

Monday evening Lloyd began his first teaching on getting free and staying free. He stressed the importance of remembering who they were in Christ, and the vast power they possessed when they stand in Persona Christi. He ended his talk with ministry to the priests, stressing the importance of renunciation. After he started them off with a few things to renounce like anger, depression, alcoholism, and envy, the priests enthusiastically joined in with many other things to renounce. Many priests came up afterwards thanking us and two priests even reported physical healings.

In Africa, the Catholic faith is growing as fast as the faith is shrinking in the West and in Europe. The Africans know that what happens in America also affects them. The Papal Nuncio was the main celebrant for the Mass on Tuesday. The priests really appreciated the fact that he spent some time with them. He spoke about the people who were killed in the bomb attack and we prayed for them as we did every day.

I was asked to teach on forgiveness in the next evening session. This is a subject that can never be talked about too much. It seems to be one of the blocks that people have throughout the world. On the surface it would seem to be a redundancy to be teaching forgiveness to priests. But in fact, these men grow up in polygamist homes, with tribal conflicts, and the usual struggle with sin, the devil and the flesh. I ended my talk with Fr. De Grandis' Forgiveness Prayer, and then our team and about 12 priests from the Fraternity came to the front of the room and just outside the doors and stood in proxy for those who may have hurt the priests in the past. Then the other participants were invited to come forward and say something like, "Dad, I forgive you for beating me and getting drunk all the time" and we then asked them for forgiveness for the one who had hurt them. There were a lot of tears! Several priests came up to me to thank me and say they had forgiven someone for the first time in their lives! Thank you Jesus!

The next day, Peter spoke at both sessions using a PowerPoint presentation. His talk in the morning was mostly about reading the signs of the times and in the afternoon he spoke about what the Spirit is saying to the Church. He quoted Pope Benedict, *"In our days, in vast areas of the world, the faith is in danger of dying out like a flame which no longer has fuel."* It was very sobering. Immediately after the talk Bishop Bagobiri came up to Peter and said, "We have got to get you to Nigeria to give this talk to the Bishops Conference.

In the evening Lloyd talked about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He led the priests in stirring into flame the gift that was given to them at Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders. Collectively we prayed for the gift of tongues, the gift of healing, preaching, teaching, wisdom and administration. The priests were very happy. The next day I spoke to a priest who told me that this was his third time attending this priests' retreat. The first year he learned about reconciliation, the second about faithfulness to his priesthood, and he felt like this year was for the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.



On Thursday Bishop Joseph and Fr. Francis again took the teaching sessions. Some of the priests were leaving tomorrow so there was a decision to have the bishop to lead a penance service and speak tonight. So after dinner Bishop Joseph spoke and then these 360 men turned to each other and heard one another's confessions. It was a beautiful thing to watch. For many of these men, who are isolated and overworked, it may have been a while since they were able to drink from the well of mercy that flows from the throne of God.

Saturday began with a special treat—Cardinal Wamala as the main celebrant of the Mass. Bishop Cyprian also spoke to the priests and really urged and challenged them to get involved in the Charismatic Renewal as the main force of the New Evangelization in Uganda. Afterwards, all of the team was asked to come up on the altar. In their wonderful style of African hospitality, they gave each one of us beautiful gifts. We said goodbye to our teammates and we settled into the van for a long 8 hour trip to Soroti. Arriving at 9:00 pm, we were warmly welcomed by the Emmaus Community, a group of people that gives their lives to the Lord by serving the Catholic Church through programs, retreats and conferences that bring the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and deepen the faith of the people.

The next afternoon, before we started the charismatic leaders' conference, we went to the local radio station for a 2 hour program and we spoke about forgiveness and some of the blocks to healing. They asked us to come back each evening to continue speaking on the radio. On Monday morning, after wonderful praise and worship we began teaching the Unbound Model of deliverance to the leaders. We conducted three 2 hour sessions each day, then have Mass followed by supper and then we quickly

drove to the radio station. This Catholic radio station has been here for a long time and the program we were asked to speak on in the most popular in the region. We were told they have a listenership close to three million people each night. Although most people do not have electricity, almost all of them own some type of battery operated radio. In a place where there is little electricity or television, we were a huge hit with the people.

On one of the call-in sessions a person asked how they could forgive the Kony Rebels, who had murdered their family before their eyes, boiled their bodies in salt water, and forced them to eat their own family. It was difficult to know how to relate to horrors such as this, but the Word of God is always true and bears life to those who through faith follow its teaching. I once again explained that forgiveness is not a feeling, it is a decision. It is not optional. Lloyd then explained that extending forgiveness does not remove justice; at the Final Judgment we will all witness the justice of God to the fullest degree, and that God's justice will be more complete than any revenge we could imagine. Each night we tried to minister via radio to real people with real problems. Some of their stories broke your heart, but once again we were amazed at the faith of these beautiful people who have suffered so much.

In one of the conference sessions we had a Q & A period. This is where we learn if we have been understood. Unlike the priests' retreat we had an interpreter for every session. Again, forgiveness is a huge issue. In this region the Iteso tribe is prominent. After the civil war the Itesos surrendered their guns to the government and because the Iteso tribe was not friendly with the current president's tribe from the south of Uganda, the government turned its back while the Karimojong tribe, who had refused to turn in their guns, raided and killed thousands of Itesos and stole over 2 million cows. There is a lot of anger and hostility towards the Karimojong, and revenge is more popular than forgiveness. One person shared that he was in Karimojong territory and went to Mass. One of the petitions at the Mass was, "Lord protect us as we raid the Itesos and bless us with many cows!" It seems that most of the Karimojong are Catholic! However, we were told that several priests had been murdered. I stressed the fact that we are Christians and Christ showed us from the Cross that forgiveness is possible.

The next morning Bishop Emmanuel of this diocese is celebrating Mass for us. He listened to our radio programs each evening and he commented on them to us before Mass and then used them in his Homily. After Mass, one of the participants shared with the bishop these thoughts about the teaching from the leaders' conference:

"I came with great expectations and I was not disappointed. These people are not your sheep, but your soldiers. I've never gotten such a level of information. We are ready to start a journey of salvation. If some of us were doubting, then we are no longer. The challenge to the leaders is how are we going to let our prayer group grow? Another challenge is how are we going to help our parish and our priest? And I predict that in three years will not have any witchdoctors. Are we not blessed?"

We truly feel that this was one of the most significant outreaches. There was openness from the priests we had not seen before and what seemed like a genuine desire to grow in holiness. Our team was great and we feel the Lord blended the different styles and material together in an unusually tight package that accomplished exactly what He wanted. It is a blessing to see the Hand of God move in difficult situations and Soroti was no exception. The blood of the Ugandan Martyrs is working powerfully and we feel the future collaboration with the Church in Uganda will bear much fruit.

