

The vultures wait for their opportunity as they watch people scavenge through the garbage looking for food and items to sell. This is how hundreds of people make a living in the basurero in Guatemala City every day.



# SILENT CHILDREN'S MISSION

## NEWSLETTER

Spring 2018

ISSUE NO. 21



**“Children are NOT a distraction from more important work. They are THE MOST important work.” C.S. Lewis**

Dear SCM benefactors,

“There is a criterion for knowing whether God is close to us or far away: all those who worry about the hungry, the naked, the poor, the disappeared, the tortured, the imprisoned – about any suffering human being – are close to God.”

Archbishop Oscar Romero

I recently travelled to Guatemala with my health science students and volunteer doctors and as we do each year we visited the basurero, the Guatemala City dump, where many families live and scavenge through the garbage looking for something to sell. These are the families we went to offer our services to in collaboration with a beautiful organization called Guatemaltecos Extraordinarios led by a man named Juan Carlos Molina. Juan Carlos sees the dignity in each person and his goal is to inspire people who come to help, to also see and feel the love of God in everyone.

To get to the basurero we walked through the adjacent cemetery where we passed desecrated tombs where the human remains of many forgotten were left for the vultures who waited for their opportunity to pounce on anything that could sustain them. There is a pecking order Juan Carlos explained; gang violence is rampant here. The people know which trucks (cont p.3)

# Spiritual Director's Letter

## Three Knots, Two Women and a Hug



The home of Teresita and Nina

I was unconsciously holding onto the three knots at the end of my cord, as I often do while talking, when I suddenly refocused my attention on them. I could not remember the last time I reflected about how profoundly those three vows I took in 1997 have shaped my life. How long had it been since I meditated on the impact of living in poverty, chastity and obedience? As I looked at them, I considered the many ways they have been an instrumental means of helping me to love more authentically. Those three simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, serve to liberate my heart and prevent me from attaching myself to possessions, people or most importantly my own self will and thus empower me to follow our Lord Jesus more closely.

“Voluntary poverty restores to man the nobility of his condition, liberating him from vile servitude and reinstating him his noble freedom and mastery of all things. The soul is never more a mistress than when she despises them, and only then has she the more firm possession and makes the more excellent use of riches, when she gives them away or leaves them of her own free will; only then her appetite for them is best satiated, when she does not care to possess them. Then above all is the heart set free and made capable of the treasures of the Divinity, for which it is furnished by the Creator with almost infinite capacity.” Ven. Mary of Agreda, p. 85

During our medical visit in Guatemala, we went to go visit two extraordinary women, a mother and daughter (Teresita and Nina), at Cambry. Cambry, as you may remember suffered a terrible disaster two years ago when over fifty homes were buried in a mud slide. After we had checked both of the women and administered some help (cleaning their ears and giving them some medicine) we were about to leave and one of us asked Teresita if

she needed anything, to which she immediately smiled and replied: “No, I have everything I need.”

This surprising and even shocking reply hung in the air ever more poignantly juxtaposed against the miserable fly infested shack she stood in front of while leaning against her half door. In pondering her spontaneous and freeing answer, I was reminded of a parable I had once heard about a rich man who taunted an old Zen master; bragging about all his financial success and then saying “I have everything I desire – what can you possibly teach me?” To which the Zen master replied “To desire less.” The rich man had yet to learn the hard truth that some arrive “in having it all” only to realize that is “all they have”.

The bold lie our consumeristic society holds out to us is not even hidden but rather blatantly presents the formula for happiness as an accumulation of materialistic goods. I remember a famous poster in the 80's which may or may not have been on my wall which depicted a mound of things, radios, televisions, equipment etc. over which was written “whoever dies with the most toys wins”. We rarely bother to question the false claims that advertisers hold out to us, those who promise fulfillment through the acquisition of things, inundating us with wants cleverly disguised as needs. The heart however knows different. St. John Paul II warned us not to have more but to be more. This became enflashed through a story one of the doctors shared about how he handled one of the angry children in his office who needed comforting. He offered the child a choice of any combination of the following options. The child could have either three chocolates, or two chocolates and one hug or one chocolate, and two hugs or three hugs. After a moment of deliberation, the child chose the three hugs, intuitively sensing the long term value of the relationship which fulfilled a deeper appetite than the short term sweets could ever satisfy.

Each of these examples affirmed the truth that St. Francis once said this way: “Understand that Poverty is a choice way of salvation; the fruit it bears is manifold, and rare are they who know it well.” Our attachment to material things, as every Buddhist knows so well, is often the cause of our suffering. Jesus therefore exhorts us, “*If you would be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor. Then come follow me.*” When we depend on anything other than God, we are tempted to make an idol of it and thus begin to serve it. We are instead called to open ourselves and be like beggars, trusting in God alone to guide and lead and fulfill the deepest longings of our heart. We can truly take a lesson from this “If you have everything but Jesus, you have nothing. If you have nothing but Jesus, you have everything.”

Peace,

Fr. Michael Della Penna ofm

# Executive Director's Update



come from the wealthier zones of Guatemala City and as the trucks arrive, they rush to be the first to find the best garbage, oblivious to those they push out of the way – those who are not as quick or strong. Some of the people have been labeled “invaders” because they have set up makeshift homes in the dump fighting to claim their territory. The children are innocent and yet have witnessed and experienced more than we care to know. However, their bright smiles and eagerness for love hides the brokenness within. This type of human suffering is caused by human action or inaction and is never acceptable and is contrary to the will of God. Dr. Paul Farmer states: “Even though it may seem like it to some, there is not a first world and a third world. There is only one world that we all share”.

Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, the father of liberation theology calls for a *preferential option for the poor*, a theology often voiced by Pope Francis. He says this option for the poor arrives from a faith in Christ and is a theologically rich defense of the principle for which Gutiérrez has become known: following Jesus involves, *as a necessity*, the preferential option for the poor.

At SCM we are in the business of being against poverty. Poverty is not the will of God – how can we be committed to helping the poor and not be against poverty? How can we not question the underlying structures that create and support poverty? The people in the basurero do not have access to good food, health care, a dry clean home, clean water and a job that gives them dignity. They die early of preventable diseases; that is not God’s will but a rejection of His will. As Fr. Gustavo says: “The first question of theology is: *How do we say to the poor: God loves you?*” We find the answer in the heart of the Gospel where we see the primacy of the poor. Jesus shows us this through His words and actions; this included the healing of the sick and this healing played a large role in His ministry. It is a mistake to accept that early death and suffering is the fate of the poor – this teaching is not made in the church.

Therefore, our primary task in following Jesus is our accompaniment of the poor, as Fr. Gustavo says “our spirituality is the comprehensive way in which we live out our faith... People are diverse, with many different characteristics, possibilities, and capacities. Thus, there are a thousand ways to practice the preferential option for the poor. Finding our own way is the task of our discernment and the goal of our spirituality.” In the season of lent we reflect on the ways we are poor and we remember that nobody is outside of the love of God – it is universal. In the Bible, this love is directed firstly to the abandoned but this preference is not opposed to universality – Jesus’ gospel speaks of priorities not exclusions.

During this time of lent we are called to conversion and hope. This hope “originates in the Crucified One who emptied himself with a radical outpouring of love, and it is rooted in the firm belief that we are called to build the Kingdom of God in the here and now”.



I want to take this opportunity to thank you, our benefactors, for supporting the medical mission by assisting with the purchase of medications and medical supplies.

We were able to deliver health care to over 350 children and provide much needed hope to those in need – without you this would not have been possible. May God bless you and your families during this holy time and may the peace and love of Jesus be with you always.

Peace,  
frankie

Farmer, P. & Gutiérrez, G. (2013). In Griffin, M. & Weiss Block, J. (Eds.), *In the company of the poor – conversations with Dr. Paul Farmer and Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez*, Orbis Books: New York.

(Left: visiting Teresita and Nina with Juan Carlos)



**REPORT FROM SR. MYRNA VELASCO (left) IN HAITI:**

“We are located in the middle of the mountains in Viloux, Haiti. This picture is from our regular feeding program for the children; we also run a clinic for the poor. On behalf of these children and the needy here in Haiti, the Compassionate Franciscan Sisters of the Poor would like to thank you all. It’s a great joy serving the Lord with gladness. It’s a great blessing too to have you supporting us in so many ways, materially and spiritually. God bless you all the more! Fr. Brian sends his greetings and prayers and thanksgiving too!”



**REPORT FROM SR. BERNADETTE DENSANI IN MALAWI:**

“Thank you to SCM for the school fees support that has made it possible for Alinafe Ganizani to graduate as a primary school teacher today!! God bless her benefactor and all those who are supporting these children!”  
Alinafe pictured here with Sr. Constancia.



**REPORT FROM FR. SOJAN PAUL IN ZOMBA, MALAWI:**

Br. Sojan is a Capuchin Franciscan and a missionary priest from India serving in Malawi. We met him while in Malawi in 2012.  
“Dear sister – peace and joy! The money which you sent was used to help in making a well in the village. Thanks for your concern and love. Please continue to support our projects to uplift the poor. May God bless you!”

**HOW YOU CAN HELP**

**Make a donation:** by cheque written to: **Silent Children’s Mission** and mail it to:  
RR#1 16060 Concession 8, Schomberg, ON L0G 1T0 Canada  
(include your mailing address for a tax receipt - SCM Registration # 815949607RR0001)  
**Donate online:** via Helps Canada or we gladly accept **post-dated cheques or e-transfers.**  
**Question?** Write to us at [silentchildrenca@yahoo.com](mailto:silentchildrenca@yahoo.com) or call 416-418-0314  
**Look for us online at:** [www.silentchildrensmission.com](http://www.silentchildrensmission.com)