

Hello from Africa by Doc Loomis

My time in Rwanda is nearly over and I am already missing this place and, most especially, the people. I have known Rwandans in my own country, but knowing them in their home is seeing them as the people of God that they truly are. The Murphy's and I have been treated with hospitality which would cause a good southern gentleman to hang his head with shame. We have been escorted to memorial sites, churches, tours, shopping, and to one of the finest dinners I have ever eaten at a local Indian restaurant with our Kigali travel agent Jeannette. As busy as he is, we have also been privileged to enjoy several very good meetings with our Archbishop and his staff. I personally appreciate Archbishop Kolini's clarity and take pleasure in listening to him speak plainly about mission.

Among the other blessings which have unfolded this week was a dinner at Fr. Louis and Winnie's house outside of Kigali. They prepared for us a dinner which resembled an American Thanksgiving, in volume if not in composition. Fr. Louis is the Archdeacon of Kigali and has been a constant companion and friend to us during our stay.

The Murphys have been very busy preparing for the teaching they began today at the Cathedral. They are working to bring a right understanding about generational sin, particularly in the areas of sexual sin and marriage. A good class began this morning I understand. I have spent much of my time walking through town and speaking with the local youth; having been particularly blessed to spend time with the older children of the genocide who are now in their twenties and trying to make their ways forward without family or home. We walk around town together hand-in-hand, as Africans do, and it is as if we have known one another for a lifetime. This is a blessed place where I have felt every moment that I was loved and appreciated by every person I have met.

Our trip to the Ayabarara orphanage near Kigali Theological College was the first of many experiences which would bring me to tears during my stay in Kigali. AMiA churches which supported the Rwandan Blessing project have donated nearly \$100,000 (Frw 60,000,000) of the \$350,000 which will be needed to complete the housing being constructed on a beautiful hillside outside of the city. There, over 30 children play and are housed in safety, cared for by loving adults. More houses are under construction just now, and the older children assist in

making bricks and cutting stone for sidewalks and foundations. Though simple, these brick homes measuring perhaps 12x18 feet each house two to three children and consist of four small rooms; two for sleeping, one for sitting, and another storage. Cooking and latrines are located in smaller mud-brick sheds near each house. Meals are simple and cooked on small burners fired with dried corn cobs, as wood can no longer be cut in the area.

The children at Ayabarara were happy to see us and enjoyed showing us their homes. The genocide which took the lives of over 1 million Rwandans was perpetrated 13 years ago, so even the smallest children are now approaching adolescence.

Today [October 1] I spent several hours at the national Genocide Memorial here in Kigali. Approaching the modern structure which resembles a large American home, we walk through a garden of about a dozen tremendous concrete slabs. Each measuring probably 100x20 feet, they are the capstones of mass graves where the remains of over 258,000 murdered Tutsis have been re-interred from the neighborhoods around Kigali where they were found. The memorial tells the story of the colonization of Rwanda; its European imposed sectarianism, and walks the visitor through the genocide in great and graphic detail. The Memorial contains the bones of many genocide victims, along with personal artifacts, clothing, weapons used in the mass murdering, and several galleries in which victims' families have posted a seemingly endless landscape of photos of their lost loved-ones.

On Sunday, Mike and I with family and friends, attended the early (English) service at the Cathedral which is quite near our lodging. The building was filled for a special Sunday led by the women of the church. It would be futile for me to try to put into words the amazing sounds of the choir, or the voices of the 80-90 children who ran to the front to receive their blessing before being ushered to Sunday School. There was vibrancy here unlike any other service I have attended. Worship began at 8:15 and ended at 10:30, just in time for the 10:00 service to begin.

The second service in Kenyirwanda was scheduled as the time when Mike and I would be invested as Canons for the Province. Archbishop Kolini was prepared to preach following a time of powerful singing by the cathedral choir. The anthem selected was Arise! We felt the choir as one voice calling out to God to be lifted up and to be present with us

and as they sang each verse to its crescendo, the Holy Spirit passed among us with such power that those of us who were visiting were compelled to stand, hands to God, with tears rolling down our faces. I have been singing this song to myself ever since.

Archbishop Kolini preached from Genesis in Kinyarwanda, but we had no trouble at all following his message which spoke of Abraham and how we must, like him, be a blessing to others. The theme was obedience, and several times he spoke in English to Mike and me to be sure that we were catching the drift of God's call to obedience and a life of sacrifice. We received his meaning.

In preparation for the service of investiture, the Archbishop lifted his own red stole into the air and, noting its color, reminded us that we were being made Canons who would be called to ...jump into the blood of the martyrs. In 27 years of ministry, I have never felt a commission so strongly stated, or felt a mantle so heavily applied as when I knelt on the first step of the large chancel of the Kigali Cathedral. It was sobering and empowering for us both.

Many gifts were given to us as the service progressed. In particular, a Bible in the native language was presented. As I returned to my seat, Canon Peter, who oversaw the service, said to me: Now you are no longer only American, you are a Rwandan. And I believe that I will remember these words forever. We have been received and sent out again with the prayers and in the spirit of mission of the Rwandan people, our brothers and sisters in Christ. As I prepare to leave this place tomorrow, I feel I am leaving my family.

When I was made a priest in America, I knew that I was canonically resident in Rwanda, but having been here in worship and service with these people I now know that I am spiritually and in every other way resident with them through the Holy Spirit which draws us together in mission.