

# **The Road to Haiti**

**Sunday, October 25, 1992**

Sitting on the edge of the first world, Haiti is the poor Lazarus dying on the doorstep of the rich man in Jesus' parable (Luke 16:19-31). Since the September 30th, 1991 military coup which ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, over 4000 people have been killed; 50,000 have fled the country, and over 400,000 displaced trying to escape this new reign of terror. Though the U.S. continues in name to oppose the defacto government, by and large, the world looks the other way as Haiti suffers under terrible repression.

Going to Haiti is a way of trying to be the good neighbor Jesus calls us to be in the parable of the Good Samaritan. I know that I need not go all the way to Haiti to love and serve my neighbor. I can live this active love right in my immediate neighborhood in Oakland, California. Yet, the God of the poor, the God of the people of Haiti, beckons.

A pilgrimage to Haiti is a pilgrimage into the heart of God, to meet God in the faces of the suffering people. This prayerful pilgrimage seeks to accompany the people, to listen to their broken hearts, and to witness to their call for justice and peace. It is a pilgrimage of Gospel nonviolence, a preferential option for the poor, a step towards human reconciliation, a way of praying, "Thy kingdom come."

After the hope of the inauguration of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February, 1991 (at the height of the Persian Gulf war), the coup has plunged Haiti back into total repression and institutionalized violence (made famous under the U.S.-backed dictatorships of the Duvaliers).

Haiti is poverty par excellence. With a population of 6.5 million people, the poorest country in the hemisphere, Haiti is the home of hunger and disease. Over eighty-five percent of the people of Haiti live in poverty. Four-tenths of one percent of the population owns 43% of the wealth, with annual incomes over \$1 million, while 17% of the population has an annual income of under \$300. Seventy-five percent of the people live in the countryside and depend on agriculture to survive. Only two percent of the rural population has access to safe water. Most families do not have electricity or running water. More than half the population has no sanitary facilities. At least one-third of all the children suffer from malnutrition. A Haitian child dies every five minutes.

We go to Haiti in response to Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the Washington Office of Haiti's request for an international presence to observe the Organization of American States (OAS) representatives who are in Haiti to monitor human rights abuses. This emergency delegation marks the first anniversary of the coup and the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in Haiti. Pope John Paul II has just left neighboring Dominican Republic, where he marked that anniversary and opened the CELAM Latin American Bishops conference meeting. The deliberate opposition by the Vatican toward Aristide and Ti Legliz, (the "Little church"), Haiti's base Christian community movement, has disappointed us all. The Vatican is the only state in the entire world to recognize the new military regime which overthrew Aristide. Even the U.S. government did not formally recognize the military government! "Rejected by all the

states of the world, these criminals are nonetheless recognized by the Vatican," Aristide declared in disbelief at the United Nations last month. "It is the only state that has chosen to bless the crimes that it was obligated to condemn in the name of the God of justice and peace." To this day, the Vatican is still the only state to recognize the defacto government. This blatant political support for a brutal, terrorist regime breaks my heart. Part of my trip will be a personal effort to participate in a Catholic reconciliation with the Haitian people, to reverse the institutional church's politics through my very own personal presence.

I met Jean-Bertrand Aristide last March in Berkeley. He spoke eloquently about the power of nonviolence. He told the story of that terrible day when the military burst into his church and massacred dozens of his parishioners before his very eyes. He said he tries to practice the Gospel mission to love one's enemies. I am deeply moved that a person dedicated to nonviolence has become the leader of the poorest nation in the hemisphere. God is blessing the poor with God's own reign of nonviolence, as Jesus promised in the Beatitudes.

Pax Christi has organized this delegation to witness the ongoing repression and to call for justice and democracy in Haiti. The Pax Christi statement says that an international presence from groups like ours will help "to reduce human rights violations (arbitrary arrests, killings, extortions, robberies, and violence perpetrated by the Haitian army); restore a measure of confidence to the Haitian people so they know they have not been forgotten by the rest of the world; and aid in the restoration of the constitutional and democratically elected government." Earlier this year, Bishop Willy Romelus declared on the radio that "the Haitian military is conducting an all-out campaign of persecution against the church. This is the situation we are living nowadays under the most criminal dictatorship Haiti has ever known." Pax Christi is committed to "stopping the repression against the community based church, the priests, the sisters, the religious leaders, the students, the women, the farmers and the poor."

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Tonight, in Miami, at the Haitian Catholic Center, we visited with a missionary priest who just returned from Haiti. "Haiti is in great crisis," he said. "There is hardly any food and little hope that Aristide will be able to return." A group of young people approached him recently and asked his help to acquire a truckload of guns. "Guns are no solution," he responded. "I don't want you or the Tontons Macoute [death squads] or the military or the USA to have guns." He promised to struggle nonviolently with them for justice and democracy.

We opened the Gospel to the parable of the Good Samaritan. Haiti is the half-dead suffering person lying in a ditch, overlooked and ignored by the rest of the world, including the church. Can we the enemy, North Americans, be the good Samaritan and act with love, compassion and mercy toward our sisters and brothers in Haiti? We prayed that God would indeed work through us, that we might become true Christian neighbors to the suffering people of Haiti.

### **Monday, October 26th**

We flew over Bimini and the Bahamas, past San Salvador, the island where Columbus landed 500 years ago, over blue-green water, white sandy beaches,

spectacular, magnificent, white clouds, and green islands, and suddenly came upon Haiti! Even from the air, it is a disaster. Instead of the beautiful green hills of the other islands, we saw brown hills, muddy rivers, a sea of tin-roofed shacks, the deforested mountains, dirt, and rock.

We were welcomed by Ron Voss of Hospice St. Joseph where we will be staying in Port-au-Prince, and also by my friend, Mev Puleo who will join us on the trip. At the Hospice St. Joseph, sitting on a hill overlooking Port-au-Prince, I noticed a quote on the wall from an Australian Aborigine woman: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

We introduced ourselves to one another. My friend Mev Puleo from Oakland is a photojournalist and a peace activist. Gary Melrose is a businessman from Lafayette, California, whom I know through Pax Christi Oakland. Gail Weston is a catechist and Pax Christi organizer from Sacramento, California. Nancy McDonald, a poet and librarian, and Beth Cioffoletti, a mother and housewife, are both from Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

We set off to two meetings with church workers struggling for justice and peace. They spoke of the repression and the poverty that continues to kill the poor. "The coup did not reach its objective," we were told. "The people still want democracy and are resisting the military, defacto government as best they can. Lawlessness has become the law of the land," the churchworkers said. "The Haitian people will resist peacefully and may pay a high price for it. But they are determined to struggle for justice. They are not going to give away the ideal of justice and peace, no matter what happens! There is hope as long as the people resist repression."

Since the September 30, 1991 coup, a military dictatorship has illegally governed Haiti. The repression in Haiti is worse now than it ever was under the Duvaliers, the church workers said. The people of Haiti overwhelmingly support President Aristide and oppose the defacto government. They want their constitution, their elected president, and democracy restored immediately.

"The only thing the defacto government has are arms," they explained. "They have no legitimation, no constitution, and no support. They get their way only through violent force." "The U.S. supports the unrest and repression in Haiti because if we have 'rest,' then the Haitian people will be able to organize and bring a real change for justice that the superpowers do not want that."

Only one of the ten Haitian bishops, Bishop Romelus, has spoken out against the defacto government. He has received many death threats. All the others support the military regime. The other nine are dismissing any seminarian who supports Aristide. "The ideology of the bishops is founded on the historical hypocrisy of the church," the church workers told us, "but the bishops are not the whole church." They asked us to encourage the people of North America to work for a full embargo against the defacto government; to pressure the Haitian government to allow the OAS delegation to investigate human rights abuses; to write the Vatican and ask them to stop recognizing the defacto government; and to do what we can nonviolently to restore democracy and President Aristide to Haiti.

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In the afternoon, we visited Cite Soleil, Haiti's poorest slum, a crowded pit where at least half a million human beings struggle to live and barely make it. Thousands of shacks crowded next to one another. They were divided by black ditches filled with excrement where naked children and pigs played. Trash is thrown about everywhere. There is no running water, no sewage system, no bathrooms, no electricity, no employment, no hospital, no grocery stores, no schools, nothing but broken, suffering people, dying under the weight of first world greed. Cite Soleil has the most appalling, desperate conditions I have ever seen. "Poverty" does not describe it. It is sheer misery, helplessness, total degradation. It is the whole third world. It is Lazarus, dying, his wounds being licked by stray dogs.

And yet, and yet, here, the poorest of the poor of the world smile at me, greet me, and welcome me. A thousand people tried to touch me because I am white and therefore rich and therefore perhaps able to help them. The children I held and mothers I met radiated life and gentleness in the midst of this cruelty and death. If every North American could see Cite Soleil and dedicate themselves to the liberation of the poor, perhaps then we might learn the meaning of the Gospel. Certainly the God of the poor lives, struggles, and dies among the suffering people of Cite Soleil. Like the City of Joy outside Calcutta, India, this is where Jesus lives, where Jesus is crucified again, and where Jesus rises once more. Cite Soleil is the end of the earth and perhaps, the beginning of heaven. It is unconscionable that such misery exists just a few miles from the opulence of Miami. If we North Americans truly were a people of compassion, we would cut our military budget and house, feed, and care for every human being in Cite Soleil.

My heart is broken. I will never be the same after Cite Soleil.

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Tonight, we met with a priest-associate of Aristide who has dedicated his life to justice and peace in Haiti. "We are living very difficult days," he began. "We live under the constant threat of death. The real problem is the total lack of free expression. For example, the military in most rural places will not let people go to church! We are witnessing the collapse of law. Many young people have been killed for putting Aristide posters on the wall. To carry Aristide's picture is a crime. A sister was jailed for two weeks for carrying his picture. We live under a military dictatorship. Today, another boat load of Haitians was forced back to Haiti by the U.S. They will be finger-printed and arrested. Some will disappear."

"Are we desperate?" he asked. "No! I am full of hope. The Haitian people are a people of hope. For thirteen months, the people of Haiti have protested this military repression with their bare hands, without any weapons, with an incredible will. They have refused the coup. The coup has failed because of the will of the people. And now, the country is going nowhere. Nothing's working. Life is becoming more and more difficult. What will happen? It cannot continue like this much longer. One day there will be a big explosion if democracy is not returned. The Haitian people have patience, but enough is enough. They want democracy."

"Haiti is a sick country," he concluded. "Sick from two centuries of oppression by a tiny group of people claiming to own the country. Haiti is just starting to discover that those days are over. The former U.S. ambassador left Haiti saying that Haiti

cannot be governed anymore like it was. Even the U.S. government is beginning to realize this. The people have tasted democracy and they want it back."

### **Tuesday, October 27th.**

At 5 a.m., I wake up in Port-au-Prince to the cry of thousands of roosters and dogs. Several gun shots went off during the night. This morning, we met a priest who lives in hiding, another associate of Aristide. "In Haiti," he said, "telling the truth is a crime. Our voice has no credibility. However, you can speak for us. This is how you can participate in the Haitian struggle for justice. Haiti is poor and it's getting poorer. Speak out against the repression and the military dictatorship," he said. "Your presence, the presence of someone visiting someone who is suffering is for us the presence of God. It's very encouraging. When you return, tell everyone about Haiti and help us restore democracy and achieve justice."

Later, four of us drove from Port-au-Prince, passed the White Palace where Duvalier reigned and Aristide was overthrown, along the coastal bay, between the rice paddies and dozens of impoverished villages north through the mountains to the port city of Cap-Haitien. The women stayed with sisters in town while we stayed at a church retreat center on the outskirts of town, on a cliff overlooking the ocean. This evening we had a good long talk with our hosts, two priests who are under constant surveillance because of their support of Aristide and the nonviolent struggle for justice. One of the priests spoke of teaching Aristide in high school, how the country erupted with joy when Aristide was elected, and how the military is tearing apart the lives of everyone here in the northern part of the country.

The church, he said, is divided between the bishops who support the military regime and the priests and people who pray for justice and peace. "We are like Israel in Egypt, waiting for the promised land," he said. "God takes a preferential option for the poor and is liberating us. In the eyes of the military, every priest is subversive, a dangerous threat, someone to be killed. But," he concluded, "as Haitians, we've been struggling all our lives."

### **Wednesday, October 28th.**

This morning, we met with a doctor and a teacher. Last week, twenty-seven houses in a nearby village were burned down by the military, they told us. "We had more space to speak and work under Duvalier than we have now," the doctor said. "The poor are at the mercy of the military. The poor are getting poorer and the handful of rich are getting richer. Since the so-called embargo began, there are some thirty new millionaires. And the church, led by the local bishop, is helping to organize the repression! The fliers against Aristide are printed and distributed by the archdiocese. Because of this, many people are leaving the church."

In the north, more than eight hundred students have been kicked out of school because they want justice and democracy, the teacher explained. Schools have been bombed and burned down. "Students are arrested and beaten. Some school officials call in the military against the students! Dozens of progressive teachers have been fired." The teacher told us how he himself was fired, arrested and beaten.

After our gathering, we visited several villages. Our contacts did not show up so we walked through the streets until the military questioned us and we decided to return

to Cap-Haitien. In the afternoon, we visited another village and spoke with the priest, teachers, and local leaders. "We are scared to meet," they told us. "Everything is at a standstill because of the military repression. The military is everywhere, watching us, arresting us and killing people. Women in particular are abused by the soldiers and section chiefs."

"Every one is scared," the priest continued. "The problem is that a small group of people have taken control of the country. They don't want democracy; they want all the people under the table. They do not want the poor to sit at the table together. Our resistance right now is a silent resistance. The people want Aristide back but they can do nothing because of the repression."

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This evening, we met in a church hall overlooking the ocean with eighteen priests, sisters, and churchworkers from throughout the north. Just as we began, the power went off. We were forced to sit in a circle and talk in the dark. I thought this provided a good metaphor for the church. One priest said that not everyone in the room could be trusted. He was not referring to us. The military has infiltrated the church, he said. Some churchworkers are spies for the repressive government, the military and its bishops. After they acknowledged the division and difficulty, they decided to continue and share their challenges and hopes.

"When I see what the head of the church is doing to us, to the suffering people of Haiti," one priest said, "I can easily conclude that there is no faith there, that I should leave. But I feel a personal conviction, a calling from God, to work here in the church with the people and so I stay with the church, with the people."

"The problem with the church," another priest said, "is the problem of power. In Haiti and elsewhere, the church has never been democratic." The institutional church operates like an empire, he said, instead of the body of Christ. "The hierarchy is scared of a small priest who has captured the imagination of the poor. The institutional church leaders use the dictatorial regime because they do not want Aristide back. They do not want the ideas of Aristide. The church is participating in the killing of the dream. It forces all seminarians who support Aristide to leave. The church is against both Aristide and democracy but they are silent about the brutal repression. Indeed, the church is not silent but actively supports the repression. The papal nuncio went to the dictator's inauguration."

"The bishops are not the whole church," someone added. "They cannot block the Holy Spirit. Christians can still engage in the struggle. The Holy Spirit is more powerful than the institutional church."

"What then is the future of the church?" someone else asked. "We have to stand up!" he answered. "If the church is still with the suffering people," one sister asserted, "it is not because they believe in the church but because they believe in God, the God of life, who opposes the systems of death."

"During Jesus' time, the disciples went into hiding," someone said. "Here in Haiti we are participating in Jesus' struggle, but with Jesus, we are not going into hiding."

"We cannot let a small group in the church, the nine bishops, lead us where we do not want to be led," one priest declared. "The more they try to destroy the church, the more the church is rising. We keep starting over again. We have a chance. We still have faith. And the poor at the base have strong convictions. They cannot read or write but they have hope."

"This struggle is a Christian struggle," another priest said. "It is not just for Haitians but for all Christians, for all people of faith. It is a struggle for life. In that struggle, we make an option for nonviolence. We do not want a violent explosion. But if things continue as they are, the country is going to explode."

After they spoke, we all stood and joined hands. The sisters led us in a Haitian song. "We will get there, we will get there, if we work together. With the help of God, we will get there!" Though the obstacles are enormous, their courage gave me hope for the people of Haiti. The Spirit of God was present in our circle singing with us, giving us new strength to go forward together in that struggle, God's struggle, for life.

As I was leaving, one of the sisters came up to me and whispered, "We know that we have to stand up or we will be accomplices. We are beginning to prepare ourselves, to prepare for jail and torture, to be killed at anytime. When we see the suffering of the people, we know we cannot live in fear. We are counting on your help."

#### **Thursday, October 29th.**

On our way from Cap-Haitien, we visited two French missionaries in a remote, rural village where famine is widespread. Last summer, the local priest, who is from Belgium, was arrested and deported. If he returned, he would be killed, we were told. Last Saturday, twenty young people were arrested and jailed. "The situation here is very difficult. People are arrested every day. Many are starving. All live in misery. You can help us by offering us some hope, by helping to change the situation in Haiti. Please do what you can for the liberation of the Haitian people," they begged.

We spent the day driving back to Port-au-Prince, sobered by the testimonies we heard and the poverty we saw. We are more determined than ever to do what we can to speak out against the military dictatorship which is killing the Haitian people.

"We are the richest people in the world," one Haitian told Ron recently, "because God is with us and our nonviolent struggle." God certainly makes a preferential option for the poor, so God is active and present in Haiti, in their suffering and in their nonviolent struggle for justice. The God of the poor is inviting us to struggle for justice with these people, God's beloved.

#### **Friday, October 30th.**

Back in Port-au-Prince, we met with representatives of Ti Legliz, the base Christian community movement. They brought with them a woman who sat quietly and stared off into the distance. Her husband was "disappeared" last month because he supported Aristide. She has looked in all the jails, but has not found any trace of him.

Ti Legliz makes a preferential option for the poor, they said, and so they speak out against the military dictatorship, denounce the repression, and pray for justice. "We want the church to follow Jesus, to do what he did, to make the same commitments he made," one youth said. "The institutional church leaders supported us as we struggled against the Duvalier regime. But they did not think we were serious in our option for the poor. Eventually, they began to call us troublemakers and subversives. Now the church leaders reject us but we continue to follow the Word of God and to stand with both feet in faith and in reality. We read the scriptures every day from the reality that we are living. We want to follow Jesus Christ. We want to be people of conscience, people with dignity. We are persecuted because we support Aristide. Since the coup, we have to be careful whenever we meet. Despite these problems, we have hope because God is with us. We are not alone. With God's help, we will continue. Our work is to make God's reign a reality here in Haiti, so that everyone is fed and has a home. With the help of God, we will turn the tables."

"We are not scared because the Holy Spirit is with us," another continued. "Our strategy is a biblical, evangelical strategy. When Jesus opened the scriptures, as Luke 4 explains, he said that the Spirit of God was upon him to announce good news to the poor. This good news for the poor is bad news for the rich. We are with the people. We are the light within the people, the salt for the food of the people. We are working for the liberation of the people."

"Nonviolence does not mean that we are going to make bad compromises," another person explained. "Nonviolence is a struggle for truth, justice, love and dignity for everybody. We struggle without arms. We are a peaceful movement, but if the repression continues, some people may take up arms."

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This afternoon, we met with Evans Paul, the young mayor of Port-au-Prince who won his election by eighty-five percent of the vote but who has been beaten and tortured by the military and now lives in hiding, unable to serve because of the military regime. "I am surprised to be alive," he said. "I do not want to go into exile. My life is in danger, but I am a Haitian. I am responsible to the people of Haiti, and so I will stay."

Evans Paul and his co-workers have formed an organization to help restore democracy by educating the people about democracy. "Since Aristide was kicked out, over twenty mayors and elected officials have been unable to serve because of the military. We want democracy installed through nonviolence. We do not want people to remain in poverty and ignorance. Our nonviolence means that we have to address the army, stand up publicly, and demand that the elected officials, including Aristide, be permitted to do their jobs. We need international friends like you," he concluded, "to help us restore democracy and bring justice to Haiti. Please do what you can to speak out for justice and democracy with us."

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Tonight, we addressed nine of the eighteen members of the Organization of American States at the Montana Hotel in Port-au-Prince. The OAS is here to monitor human rights abuses, but since their arrival in September, they have rarely left their plush, first world hotel.

"Thank you for inviting us to share what we have heard and seen," I began. "We want to say first that we share many of the same goals that you do, that we stand together in loving concern for the people of Haiti. We have traveled throughout Haiti and there are four basic points which we have heard over and over again from the Haitian people.

"First, everywhere we have gone throughout the country, people have told us that they are living under terrible repression. We have met with farmers, churchworkers, students, teachers, and doctors, and all these people tell us that the repression is worse than ever. Indeed, the brutal repression against the people of Haiti, we were told again and again, is much worse now than it was before 1986 under the notorious Duvaliers. Since the September 30th, 1991 coup, Haiti continues in a state of total lawlessness under this brutal military dictatorship. The people of Haiti told us that they want this lawlessness stopped. They want their constitution, their elected president, and democracy restored immediately.

"Second, we want to emphasize that this unjust military regime has murdered over 4000 people in the past year. Haiti is suffering a state of terror. The military regime has organized widespread intimidation and harassment against the people who tell us that 'this is an illegal government, governing illegally.' Their constitutional rights are violated. Throughout the countryside, whenever two or three people meet, they may be arrested for illegal assembly. They experience flagrant human rights abuses every day. Because of the coup and this illegal government, we have heard countless stories of random arrests and torture; of jailings and killings; of the plight of thousands of internal refugees; of people living in fear and hiding; of houses and cars being illegally, randomly searched; of the increase in the drug trade since the coup; and of the special harassment against teachers and church workers. On top of all these human rights abuses, we see the ongoing systemic abuse of hunger, disease, homelessness, and illiteracy. The military government considers any development and humanitarian projects as subversive. The people of Haiti want these injustices to end now.

"Third, we have heard detailed accounts about the brutal 'section chiefs' who rule the countryside as rural dictators, hiring 'attaches' to beat, arrest, torture and kill people daily.

"Fourth, the people of Haiti have told us and we have seen with our own eyes that the U.S. embargo is not real, that ships continue to come to Haiti. The people have told us they want a real embargo to cut off support for the military regime.

"In sum, we invite you to do what you can to restore the democratically elected government and constitution of Haiti; to live up to the OAS's 'non-negotiable goal' of bringing President Aristide back to Haiti; and to stop the repression and restore democracy," I concluded. "The people of Haiti are aware of the OAS delegation and are hopeful that you will speak out strongly against the repressive, defacto government. People have told us that it is urgent that you go into the countryside to hear for yourselves about the repression so that you can speak out for the restoration of democracy."

"Having visited various places throughout the country and listened to the voice of many people," I concluded, "we want to encourage you to work to bring back the democratically elected government of President Aristide, to expose the section

chiefs, to enforced a real embargo, to stop the repression against the people and to restore democracy to Haiti."

"We are still committed to returning President Aristide, but our hands are tied," the OAS leader responded, "but we hope to get into the countryside to report on the repression against the Haitian people."

### **Saturday, October 31st, 9:30 a.m.**

This morning, we met with a priest who has led the struggle for justice in Haiti for decades. He lives in hiding, receives daily death threats, but remains full of joy and hope.

"Aristide made an option for nonviolence, which is the best option," he began. "Without his nonviolent response during the coup, Haiti would be like Lebanon or Yugoslavia. We have chosen an active, nonviolent resistance. When the coup happened, many were shot at the White Palace. Aristide said, 'Let's surrender and not use arms.' The more I reflect on that, the more I realize now that was the best answer. We do not have weapons to fight the armed forces. We continue to fight back today, but we do not have to use violence. We reject violence. We use active nonviolence."

"Haitians know that the power is in their hands," he continued. "If we are Christians, if we really believe in God, we should not be afraid. Death should not stop us from acting. Jesus Christ has overcome death. So we can believe and act for change. We have to stay and face the monster. We can't leave Haiti to the monster. They can kill our bodies, but not the Spirit. As Christians we have to give an example. We should not be afraid of death. We should stand up to it."

"Bishop Romelus has saved the Haitian church. The other bishops bless the criminals. They have done terrible things. Yet Haitians have kept the faith and God has blessed them. God is near the people. The bishops have done their best to destroy the church but they have not succeeded. With Bishop Romelus, we are beginning more and more to speak out against the repression. Tell my friends in exile that my name is on many death lists, that I receive death threats, that I hope I will make but if not, tell them we will be together one day with God."

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Afterwards, we visited the orphanage run by Aristide before he became president. In December, 1990, just after Aristide was elected president, four teenagers were killed here by the military. In June, the military regime burned down the main building, but still the boys live in the rubble. They have nowhere else to go. They play basketball amidst the ruins and stench and greet us with smiles.

What kind of spirit could possess people to burn down an orphanage and kill poor, homeless kids? What kind of world so hates a priest who stands with the poor in a nonviolent spirit of hope? What kind of people could do these things? We walked through the ruins, talked with the kids and prayed to God for justice.

Then, we visited the Home for the Dying run by the Missionaries of Charity. Several dying people are brought there each day while three or four people die there each day, the sisters told us. On Tuesday, while we were driving north, Gail and Nancy spent some time massaging the patients. When they arrived, a dead body lay at the door. Today, we greeted the ill, held hands with them, and listened to them, knowing as Mother Teresa says, that Christ is present in these suffering, dying sisters and brothers, the poorest of the poor.

From the Home for the Dying, we went to the ruined shell of St. John Bosco's church, the parish where Fr. Aristide lived and worked. While he was saying Mass one Sunday in the late 1980s, scores of soldiers with guns and machetes entered the church and massacred dozens of people, injuring hundreds. The church was subsequently burnt down. Today, we stood at the iron gates where the doors would have been and looked into the church sanctuary. There is no roof anymore, only a shell, only ruins. After a moment of silent prayer, we sang a popular Haitian hymn, with the words of Jesus, "Come enter into my kingdom." The ruins embody the persecuted, crucified church that stands with the poor and speaks out for God's justice.

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This afternoon, we met with a member of Aristide's government and one of his closest friends. "I work for change in Haiti as a Christian," he said. "We are trying to resolve this crisis of injustice. But now, I live in hiding. Anytime I am with someone, I am at great risk.

"The coup has failed because thirteen months later, the people still refuse the coup. The coup is like a transplant which the body refuses. I am convinced that Aristide will be back because the people reject the military regime. Aristide accepts the risk of returning. He is like a lightning rod which prevents lightning. If Aristide does not return, the situation of the poor will get even worse. But if he returns, the poor will find their hope again and start rebuilding Haiti. Please join us in our work to bring real change in Haiti."

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Tonight, I sit here on a balcony overlooking Port-au-Prince during a black out, I feel sad to be leaving Haiti. I feel helpless and powerless in the face of the forces arrayed against the poor, and yet I know there are some things my friends and I can do. So when I return home, I will work to get the word out, to help return democracy to Haiti and to end poverty and suffering.

I feel helpless after all the stories of repression, brutality and suffering. And yet, I take hope. God has not abandoned the Haitians. Nor has God abandoned me. I too will trust in the God of the poor, the God of justice, the God of peace, the God of nonviolence. I will follow Jesus, just as the suffering Haitian people do. So I must carry on the journey even against overwhelming odds, and do what I can to help welcome God's reign.

