

HAITI: Abject Poverty Has Lesson for America

By John Dash

In Brooklyn, last month, a single television mounted atop a packing crate drew the attention of 200 neighborhood people. On display was an ordinary American situation comedy, and its attendant commercials, creating the image of "the American dream — idealizing our materialistic society," a visitor to the area noted.

This Brooklyn, however, is not a borough of New York City, but a shanty town on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince, capital city and showcase of the Republic of Haiti.

Brooklyn and its immediate neighbor, Boston, are the size of four football fields. There is no running water. Sanitation control is minimal. Disease festers there on a scale "an American cannot begin to comprehend." And 100,000 people live in each area. In one week alone, 700 cases of tuberculosis were identified, the American visitor, Father Michael Sullivan, reported.

Father Sullivan, intern associate at St. Michael's in Newark, and Father Michael Bausch, assistant pastor at St. Patrick's in Seneca Falls, made Brooklyn their vacation site last month.

For Father Sullivan it was a return trip, for Father Bausch an eye-opening first encounter.

The object of the priests' visit was multifold. Father Sullivan intended to renew his friendship with a congregation of missionary nuns who operate clinics, orphanages



and schools in the republic, and he also wanted to sharpen his perceptions of the problems of Haitian life and the role the white man and the white systems of United States industry play in those problems.

For both men, the trip to Brooklyn was also a spiritual journey, an attempt to encourage the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent DePaul in their missionary efforts, and to learn more themselves of Haitian life so they might speak knowledgeably to diocesan groups of the problems there.

Both men said they see themselves as "alternative missionaries," preaching to the people back home.

As Father Sullivan said, "Poverty — this isn't an act of God. We make poor people."

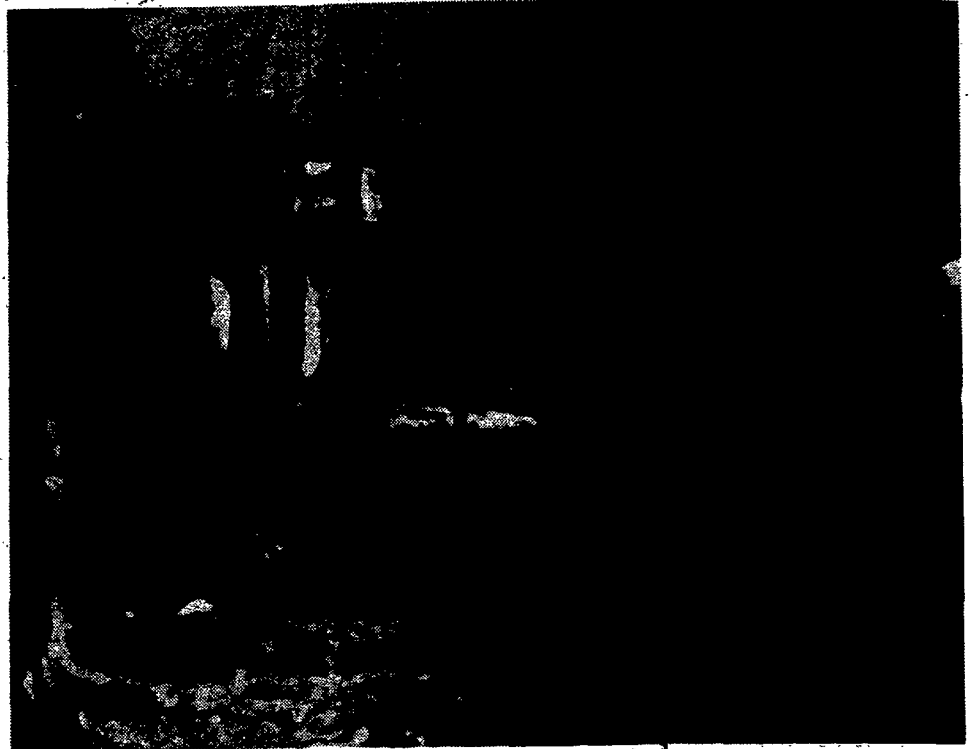
Father Bausch registered his disappointment that neither of them were able to stay directly in Brooklyn because of an epidemic of malaria there.

The two nevertheless visited the missions there frequently during their stay.

Twenty years ago, Father Sullivan explained, Brooklyn and Boston were nothing but swamp land. "The whole area is right on the sea."

He said that the government of Jean-Claude "Papa Doc" Duvalier ordered a runway built through the slums outside Port-au-Prince to attract the commerce that aviation would bring the republic. At that time, Father Sullivan said, a Pere Volel, "Haiti's Mother Teresa" was instrumental in encouraging the slum-dwellers to move to the Brooklyn and Boston sites, and getting the area drained for construction.

Father Sullivan and Father Bausch met the famed priest last month and reported that although he is suffering from tuberculosis, he nevertheless remains among his people, burying the dead, his first ministry, and challenging the voodoo gods right inside their own temples.



A street scene in Brooklyn.

Father Sullivan remarked that Pere Volel is the only white person in the republic able to do that. Father Sullivan said the priest has "earned the respect" of all Haitians.

Despite the fact that the Church's ministries in Haiti may seem futile in face of the problems of the people there, the Church is "trying to make up for systematic lacks and oppression," Father Sullivan said.

But, "The reality is that (such ministry) is not changing the system," he said.

That systematic change seems to be an organic development in Haitian life, both priests noted, however. "It's starting to develop like a pressure cooker," Father Sullivan said.

To help Haitians, both men feel, is to "challenge United States values," he said. "It is important that our philosophy is not based on paternalism but on responsibility."

Father Sullivan asked

himself, "What role do we have, to challenge and critique U.S. sugar firms in Haiti? Do we challenge their presence and their economic role?"

Father Bausch said of the trip, "You can hear about the Grand Canyon, you can see pictures of it, but you must experience it. You can't understand it otherwise."

Both priests have a slide presentation on Haitian life which they are willing to present to diocesan groups.

Parish Sets St. Joseph Table Rites

A celebration of the ancient custom of the St. Joseph's Table will be staged by St. James Church the weekend of March 13 and 14. Msgr. George Cocuzzi will officiate at the blessing rites following the 5:30 p.m. Mass, March 13. "Il Coro Italiano," under the direction of organist Paul Guzzetta, will sing. The table will be on display after the Masses on Sunday. Persons wishing to contribute or donate Italian baked goods have been asked to contact members of the parish liturgy committee: Loretta Perrotta, 288-6396; Mary Przynsinda, 482-9237; Bernice Kleinhammer, 482-2707; Grace Zanche, 654-9183.

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Seven Last Words

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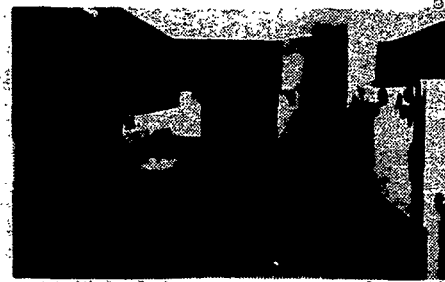
were now to be in relationship with each other. As an expression of their commitment to Jesus, they would accept responsibility for each other. They love each other out of love for Jesus.

How are we to identify with these words of Jesus? John stands for all of us who seek to be the followers of Jesus in our lenten journey to Calvary. Jesus says to each of us: "Behold, your mother!" Even though Mary may not

have understood the cross in her life or her Son's life, she nonetheless loved her Son to the end. We look to Mary as we are confused about the meaning of the cross in our lives. She will show us how to love through her example of love for her Son and for each one of us.

With a mother's love, Mary beckons us to draw closer to her Son on the cross. In turn, as we stand near His cross, we need to listen to the call of Jesus to us. He calls us to come closer to His mother and to the whole Church.

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