

Humanity at its Best

Haiti! As horrendous a human disaster as can be imagined! Immediately and inevitably, the cry is raised. Why? How could a good and loving God permit such unspeakable suffering?

Faith recognizes the problem, cannot fully explain it, and only seeks to help us deal with it. From the first sin of Adam by which the ground became accursed, through the sufferings of Job and the plaintive cries of the psalmist, in Paul's vision of all creation groaning as in childbirth: while the Scriptures seek to vindicate God's providence in light of evil and the anguish of human suffering, they account for this seeming contradiction only through the absurdity of the Cross, whose message is meaningless and foolishness to the unbeliever.

In enduring this struggle of faith, how impressed we must be by the generous and often historic responses of so many to this desperate moment in human history.

Humanity at its Best

As with the tsunami that hit southeastern Asia, the international community responded immediately to the devastation in Haiti (casualty estimates are at 200,000 as of the date of this draft), with countries sending personnel, medical supplies, food, water, tents and other emergency aid immediately after the earthquake.

The magnitude of the disaster even led two political enemies to put differences aside, as Cuba opened its restricted airspace to U.S. medical-evacuation missions, reducing flight time to Miami by 90 minutes.

From professional athletes, actors and musicians to organizations such as the World Food Bank, United Nations, European Union and the American Red Cross, humanitarian response from around the globe has been spontaneous and seemingly united in a common refrain: "We cannot allow our human sisters and brothers to suffer. We must help them."

America at its Best

As is so often the case when tragedy strikes, the United States is leading the way in the recovery effort in Haiti. In addition to being the wealthiest nation in the world – and as such having the most modern and sophisticated means of providing support in such disasters – the United States is also the most willing. Our people are among the most generous in the world, and our nation is often the first to offer support when any disaster strikes.

All five branches of the U.S. Armed Forces are being pressed into duty in Haiti. American troops were immediately dispatched to reopen Haiti's main airport, with members of the U.S. Air Force being charged with handling security and cargo operations, and U.S. Marines expected in country this past Friday. The Baltimore-based USNS Comfort hospital ship set sail this past Saturday morning for its biggest mission ever. With a capacity to serve as many as 1,000 patients at a time, the U.S. Naval vessel will provide much-needed medical supplies and care to the people of Haiti.

Even domestic politics took a back seat to human compassion in the days immediately following the earthquake, as President Obama announced former presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush have agreed to lead a fundraising effort in the United States to harness the good will and sympathy so many Americans feel toward the suffering in Haiti.

The Catholic Church at its Best

Perhaps no organization is better positioned to respond to the needs of the Haitian people than Catholic Relief Services. Responsible for managing the U.S. Church's international charitable outreach, the Holy See asked the Baltimore-based agency to coordinate the Universal Church's relief and recovery efforts in the heavily-Catholic country of Haiti.

"The past experience, expertise, and resources of CRS will enable prompt and effective coordination of the Church's efforts, which in the words of Pope Benedict, must be generous and concrete to meet the pressing needs of our Haitian brothers and sisters," the Vatican said.

Cardinal Francis George, President of the U.S. Bishops Conference, also cited the

benefits of CRS' presence in Haiti when he announced last week that Catholic parishes throughout the U.S. would be asked to hold a special collection to support relief efforts.

Funds collected, he said, will be used to respond to emergency needs such as "water, food, shelter and medical care, as well as long-term need to rebuild after widespread destruction, and to the pastoral and reconstruction needs of the Church in Haiti."

Baltimore at its Best

Closer to home, as news of the earthquake began to reach people in our Archdiocese, individuals, parishes and schools immediately began looking for ways to help their sisters and brothers in Haiti.

Their desire to help, I suspect, was as much a product of their goodness as the connection they feel to the people of Haiti as a result of our common faith and the partnerships forged with our sister Diocese of Gonaives.

The partnership is the fruit of the decades-long labors of Deacon Rodrigue Mortel, Director of Missions for the Archdiocese and founder of the Haiti Outreach Project.

Dr. Mortel, a native of Haiti still with family and a home there, eschewed a successful career as a physician at Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center in Pennsylvania to become a Catholic deacon and to assist in the spreading of the Word of God to people of all nations. Before the earthquake hit, the people of the Archdiocese already were supporting some 18 parishes and three schools in our sister Diocese and feeding 15,000 Haitian children every day.

Dr. Mortel, in spite of being unable to reach family in Port-au-Prince immediately after the earthquake, continued to be present at the Catholic Center last week to direct his office's response to the tragedy and left with CRS for Haiti earlier this week to lend his surgical and spiritual gifts where they could most help. We are blessed to have him lead this valuable ministry and we pray for him and his family.

With the unspeakable disaster in Haiti, we have seen humanity at its best. Just as we pray for those who have lost lives and loved ones, homes and hope, we also owe our

thanks and prayers to all who have responded so generously to the sufferings of our human sisters and brothers.

To those who were unable to participate in Sunday's special collection or would like to send money to CRS directly, you can do so by mail (CRS, P.O. Box 17090 Baltimore, MD 21203) or via the Internet (www.crs.org).