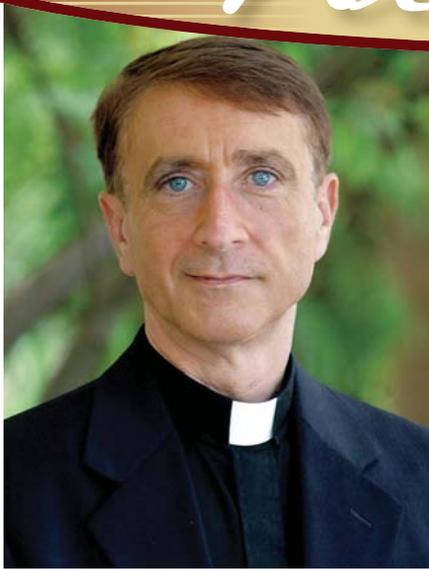


# OUTREACH PRIEST *Reflections*



by Fr. Bernard Olszewski

Like most of the men who were educated in Rome, my seminary formation was of the intellectual type. I received some of the best theological training in the world and I believed that I knew, as fully as humanly possible, what it meant to be a good priest. I remained in Rome for another three years after priesthood ordination and upon completion of my studies began a college teaching career with parochial ministry on some week-ends when asked. My life was satisfying and I thought I was making an impact upon the life of the Church. My comfortable little world was shattered almost twenty years later when a classmate from Rome invited me to “come, see” what was going on a world I had only heard about. I went on a mission trip to Haiti and my world was turned upside down.

At the time of that trip I had been a Conventual Franciscan for over thirty years. I knew about poverty, had taught in an inner city high school, had classmates working in the missions of Ghana in West Africa who shared their stories. I thought I knew the plight of the poorest of the poor — and I did in my head. When I went to Haiti and saw the work of Cross Catholic Outreach I suddenly saw the poor through the eyes of my heart. God spoke to me during that trip and invited me on a new journey, one in which I walked along with the poor and helped to transform this world into the Kingdom of God.

I have not been given the charism of the vocation of a missionary in the field. I understood that. However, that did not excuse me from doing what I could to bind myself to the poor and help them transform their lives through the most effective way that I could find, preaching for a Catholic organization which understands what the message of the gospel truly is. For me, that means serving as an Outreach Priest for Cross Catholic Outreach. For me, it means that I have the duty to tell the stories of the poor to those who would never hear them with the hope that we can act as a single family of God and work together to change hearts and lives for the better all across the globe.

Oddly enough for my journey, in a sense of divine irony, this meant leaving a religious community founded as itinerant preachers so that I could take up the life of an itinerant preacher. I was incardinated into the Diocese of St. George’s, Grenada so that I could live my full-time ministry with Cross Catholic Outreach and since then I have enjoyed graces beyond my wildest dreams. Every weekend I have the privilege of meeting a new parish community with whom I can minister in the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. I have the privilege of telling the stories of men, women, and children whom I have met on subsequent mission trips. I have the honor of being their presence in the parish community and to humbly ask for support for the works which change the world.

The graces I have received in this ministry far exceed whatever good I have been able to bring about through my preaching. Today, I can honestly say that I understand what Pope Francis meant when he asked us priests to be “shepherds living with the smell of the sheep.”

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