OUTREACH TO HAITI GALA 2017

Fr. Frank, My Brother Priests, All Who Support the Work of Outreach to Haiti, All of You Gathered Here Tonight:

Good Evening!

I am very happy to have been invited to speak with you this evening at this wonderful Gala. I have come to thank you for the great work that is being done through the Diocese of Norwich Outreach to Haiti. Thank you also because you continue to speak with your heart each time you stretch out your hand to help someone else. As we hear in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt. 25: 31-46): “I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink…..Whatever you did for the least of my people, you did for me…” This is what Jesus tells us.

I’d like to begin by telling you that from 2000 until 2004 I was pastor of the parish of Fon-Baptiste, which is one of the parishes twinned through Outreach to Haiti.

As Auxiliary Bishop of Port-au-Prince, I presently serve as President of Caritas Haiti. I know well the problems and suffering of the Haitian people. When natural catastrophes occur such as earthquakes, hurricanes, flooding and situations involving people going hungry, children unable to attend school, wide-spread disease and people with no home in which to sleep, a bad situation suddenly becomes worse.

During the earthquake of 2010 I was pastor of the Cathedral parish in Port-au-Prince and Director of the Diocesan Office of Caritas. At that time I witnessed the death of Archbishop Serge Miot and our Vicar General, Monsignor Charles Benoit. Many choir members also died that day inside the cathedral as well as many religious who were praying in the parish chapel of Perpetual Help, in the Belair section of Port-au-Prince. Many problems immediately arose: I spent a lot of time removing people who were near death from the cathedral, the chancery and religious houses and getting them to hospitals and emergency centers so they could receive some primary care. It was not an easy time. I spent six months, at times with nothing to eat, sleeping under a tent, because the rectory was badly damaged. Then a group of bandits began stealing what was left in the rectory and set fire to the building. However, despite all of this, I was never discouraged. I continued to work to help those who were in such greater need.

This same type of work was carried out by all who love and care for the people of Haiti. Many did what they could to ease the suffering of others. Certainly, all of you who are part of Outreach to Haiti stepped up and whole-heartedly did what you could, reflecting the love you have for the Haitian people.

What made this work possible was all of the donations Outreach received from all of your benefactors and supporters who join you in your care and concern for Haiti. You gave what you had to help us in this difficult time. This is a great gift as it reflects our call to share what God has given us with those who suffer and are in need, especially the children and those who are abandoned.

As Pope Francis once said: “We are to bring the caress of the Church, our mother, to those who are suffering.”

I ask you who are here this evening: Do you want to do this? I ask that you continue to act in this way as you share what you have. Bring that caress to others. In this way, your hearts will be filled with joy. As God’s Word tells us that there is more joy in giving than in receiving.

The suffering of others; those who are sick or starving, those with no place to live, nowhere to sleep, children on the street, children who are abused, people forced to leave their country due to dire living conditions, children unable to go to school, adults who cry because they have no clothes for their children, young people who cause problems because they cannot continue their education and have nothing else to do, pregnant women who die in child birth because they have no access to medical care. All of these things should cause you concern. All of this should speak to you.

In 2010 Haiti experienced a great earth quake. This evening, in 2017, I am asking you to experience a “***heart quake***”. Let your heart tremble for all who suffer throughout the world, especially the people of Haiti. Let your heart tremble before all of the calamities occurring throughout the world. This is why we are here tonight. This is why I left Haiti to be with you tonight. I came to speak with you and to encourage you always to care for the needs of others.

In Luke’s Gospel (16: 19-31) we find the story of the Rich Man. This parable asks us to become aware of those who suffer. The name Lazarus is of Greek origin which translates “God is my help”. In this story it is not food and money that Jesus condemns, it is self-centeredness and hardness of heart, because the rich man closed his eyes in the face of Lazarus, who was suffering in front of his gate. However, God came to the aid of Lazarus, God saw his great suffering.

Now, God is asking each of you to look and see those who are sick and suffering today. The great suffering of so many throughout the world, especially those who hunger and have no bread, should move you with compassion and a desire to respond to these needs.

Through responding in this way, Outreach to Haiti is helping others through:

* Providing medical care to all who come to your clinic in the Kris Wa section of Port-au-Prince.
* Providing education to more than 230 children enrolled in elementary, secondary, trade schools and universities. Each child reflects the wonder of God here on earth. Look at the wonderful work you are doing through this education program!
* The support that you give to parishes and the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince. There is a priest working in St. Jude’s parish in Grande Savane, where I was born. His parish is not yet part of Outreach to Haiti Parish Twinning. He is hoping that one day this will change. Yet that doesn’t stop him from being grateful for all that this program is doing, for the difference this makes throughout the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince.

Tonight I don’t applaud you because of the money you give; rather I applaud you because of the love in your hearts which allows you to reflect the mercy of God. This is the greatest gift of all, everything else flows from it. I can say to you now, this is what Outreach is doing: uniting your spirituality with material well-being. Money is not the most important thing for you. You go forth to serve others in love and solidarity as witnesses of the Gospel.

Thank you for all that you are for the world; for the Church in the United States and in Haiti; for all who live in poverty and need.

In the 16th chapter of Luke’s Gospel is the parable of the Good Samaritan, where Jesus told the doctors of the law “Go and do likewise”. This evening I am asking each of you to let your heart speak, to go and do likewise, to continue to help those who are in need.

May God bless you! May God bless America!

Thank you very much!