



HAPPY EASTER!



S.M.A. Museums in Service to Africa



As we continue the journey with our Founder this year, celebrating his 150th anniversary of giving his life we recall his words regarding the proclamation of the Good News to different cultures. “They want to wait until they transform these people into something else entirely – into Frenchmen or Englishmen,... before they will allow them to be fully Christians – before they will honestly initiate them into everything that our holy Religion implies. Just make them children of God and His Church. Your admirable religion Lord, modifies societies, perfects, civilizes them. But it does not change the essential character of a people. It does not need to. Being Catholic in full meaning of the word, the Church has been made for all places as well for all people. It can be home anywhere.” (Souvenirs)

The SMA Fathers’ museum in New

Jersey, tries to keep this message alive. Presenting all that is positive in the African cultures. Helping people to understand the spirituality of Liberians, Ivoirians, Beninois, and Nigerians to name a few, displaying various dimensions of the art of Africa, allows us to fulfill the words of our founder. We collect, preserve, exhibit, publish and teach the arts and crafts of traditional sub-Saharan Africa so that we can communicate this profound spirituality to our audience.

The present director of the museum, Dr. Robert J. Koenig, has been keeping the displays of the museum alive with new exhibits. Inviting various schools in for presentations and always happy to educate any groups who wish to take advantage of the displays and his knowledge of African Art. There is a constant flow of children, adults, senior citizens,

scholars and collectors who are always amazed at what is available for viewing.

This month we open a new display on Malian puppets. The display is from a collection of Mary Sue and Paul Peter Rosen. The exhibit is explained in a catalogue which is written by Dr. Mary Jo Arnoldi the Curator of African Art and Ethnology, Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. We are very grateful that she has allowed us to share these extremely interesting artifacts, to stimulate interest in African Art.

DATES TO REMEMBER:

March 15 Opening of

“Sogo Bo: The Animals Come Forth”

Also throughout 2009, we will have on display, various pictures and articles on the life of our founder Msgr. Marion de Bresillac.

Otis—A Man with a Vision *by Steve Phillips*

When Steve Phillips, S.M.A. Lay Missionary, served in the Buduburam Liberian Refugee Camp in Ghana, he met Otis Nyemah. Steve shares his story: I met Otis over 4 years ago when I was working at the refugee camp. At one point, he had been sleeping on a table in the market. Patrick (Steve's co-worker) noticed Otis and invited him to come train as a tailor and sleep in the workshop. By the time I arrived, Otis was well into his tailoring training, and doing well. Otis had a vision and plans to do even more. He wanted to continue training and learn embroidering or "designing," as it's referred to here. Liliane Fonds, a charitable foundation, agreed to help Otis with his embroidery training.

After completing his training, Otis was ready to open his shop. **He wanted to return the assistance he had received by assisting other people with disabilities** to learn how to sew and embroider. The UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees), wasn't able to help in the way that he hoped and needed. Through donations from my family, friends and Liliane

Fonds, we were able to help him meet some of his goals—he was able to get an embroidery machine, a few extra sewing machines and a generator for the many times the power goes out. Otis established a school in his workshop where he trained people with different disabilities. At the same time he was running his own tailoring business. Twice a week he gave sewing classes at the School for the Deaf, which encouraged him to learn sign language.

For the past few months, there has been increased pressure on Liberians to return to Liberia. UNHCR's repatriation allowed a limited amount of baggage. In order to ship back his tailoring equipment, Otis needed additional money to cover the cost. God works in wonderful ways and just at that time a friend of mine came to visit the camp, met Otis and with money he had set aside, he was able to help Otis ship his tailoring equipment to Liberia where he had someone trustworthy to receive it and watch over it until he returned. Otis submitted a proposal to UNHCR for assistance in establishing a training school in Liberia, similar to the one he established in Ghana. In the meantime he registered with the UN who would pay for his return trip to Liberia. He needed to wait while his proposal was reviewed in Ghana. Stranded at the camp, although with his *means of living* secure with his friend in Liberia, we were able to help him out with a few donations while he waited . . . and waited . . . After two months, UN told him that they could not fund his proposal in Ghana and he should return to Liberia to submit the proposal

there. So, finally he was headed back—and all was ready to go—The plane that the returning Liberians were to be on had mechanical problems. He was delayed another couple weeks! Now he is back in Liberia. He hit the ground running—checked out his stuff, which was all fine, then went to Ganta, Liberia where he wants to set up his school, to see what the situation is like and what he would need. When he returned to Monrovia, he submitted his proposal to the *Liberia Refugees Repatriation and Reintegration Commission* and to the *United Nations Development Program*, who told him that he will have to wait until next year before they could give him a response.

Otis has always impressed me. He has his dreams, his plans, his goals which will help him and will build up his country. And not just build up his country by introducing new skills, but will **build up a group of people, the ones with disabilities, who are often left behind.**



Above (L-R): S.M.A. Lay Missionary Steve Phillips and Otis Nyemah in Buduburam Refugee Camp, in front of his Sewing shop.

Prayer for S.M.A. Vocations
God our Father, we pray that you would bless our Church with many members who are filled with a missionary spirit. Extend your call to our youth, and instill in them the desire to devote themselves to you and to the service of the most abandoned areas of Africa. Strengthen us in the vocation we have received. May our lives give witness to others of the joy of serving you. We ask this through Christ your Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Mary, Queen of the Missions, Pray for us.

Empty Tomb or Interior Castle? Fr. Daniel Lynch, S.M.A.

In the sixteenth century, St. Teresa of Avila wrote *The Interior Castle*. It is an Easter story which Fr. Jack Welch, O.Carm., in *Spiritual Pilgrims*, describes as “an invitation to enter into the dying and rising of Christ and so enter into union with God.”

The Interior Castle is about a journey within oneself to discover God dwelling at the center of one’s soul. For Teresa, the soul was the whole human person. In her book *The Way of Perfection* Teresa wrote that St. Augustine “sought God in many places but found him ultimately in himself.” In order to make this journey more understandable, in *The Interior Castle* she used the image of a castle. In Teresa’s words “we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of a very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places.” For Teresa, although God is everywhere, it is in the center of the castle “where the very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place.” Teresa limits the number of rooms or mansions to seven in *The Interior Castle*.

Unfortunately, writes Teresa, “we seldom consider the precious things that can be found in this soul, or who dwells within it, or its high value. All our attention is taken up with the plainness of the diamond’s setting or the outer wall of the castle; that is, with these bodies of ours.” As Teresa tells us, “there is a great difference in the ways one may be inside the castle.” Many remain “in the outer courtyard.” Teresa writes that “the door of entry to this castle is prayer and reflection.” Prayer deepens as one advances through the castle and draws closer to God.



Above: The Spice-Bearing Women find the burial cloths at the Empty Tomb.

In the fifth mansion Teresa introduces the image of a butterfly to explain the dying and rising process needed to enter more deeply into the castle that will result in union with God. The butterfly, writes Jack Welch, is a guiding image “for the entire castle adventure, and the transitions involved in all the dwelling places.” For Jack Welch, “the butterfly symbolizes the paschal mystery.” He adds that “the image of the butterfly represents for many people the fresh and the beautiful, but fragile, life which appears just when the cocoon of darkness appears to be a permanent state.”

Describing this image of the butterfly and the changes it goes through, Theresa writes: “*The silkworms come from seeds about the size of little grains of pepper. (I have never seen this but heard of it, and so if something in the explanation gets distorted it won’t be my fault.) When the warm weather comes and the leaves begin to appear on the mulberry tree, the seeds start to live, for they are dead until then.*

The worms nourish themselves on mulberry leaves until, having grown to full size, they settle on some twigs. There with their little mouths they themselves go about spinning the silk and making some very thick little cocoons in which they enclose themselves. The silkworm, which is fat and ugly, then dies, and a little white butterfly, which is very pretty, comes from the cocoon.”

As the silkworm is nourished by the mulberry leaves, so we are nourished by those “remedies which God left in His Church.” Like the caterpillar or mature silkworm, our life, lived in glorifying God and serving others, “begins to spin the silk and build the house wherein it will die.” Teresa encourages us to “let this silkworm die, as it does in completing what it was created to do.” For Teresa, the silkworm’s death was symbolic of a dying to self and to all those things that are not God.

Just as the caterpillar sleeps in the chrysalis awaiting its new birth as a butterfly, Christ, who lay in the tomb for three days, was also undergoing a profound transformation thus completing the task he was created to do. For those who witnessed his Crucifixion and burial, Jesus must have “seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead” (*Wisdom 3: 2*). When the women, who accompanied Jesus from Galilee, went at daybreak to anoint Jesus in the tomb in which he lay, it was no wonder that they were “puzzled” by Jesus’ absence and “terrified” by “two men in dazzling garments,” who asked them, “Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but he has been raised” (*Lk 24:1-7*).

Tropical Africa's Rainforests



At last, the miracle of Spring is here in North America, and trees return to full life, after a leafless Winter. In

tropical rainforest areas of Africa, it is always "Summer." Most of Africa is not rainforest, but the part that is (less than 10% of the continent), is huge—second only to South America's Amazon—and biologically rich.

As in the Amazon, this forest is precious. It holds amazing and beautiful plant and animal life, but also rare materials and critically-needed medicines not even discovered yet. Beyond that, the forest functions as an irreplaceable "lung" by giving oxygen not just to Africa, but to the world. As industrialization and expanding population destroy so many areas around the globe, we as a species and a planet desperately need the clean air provided by rainforests.

Ominously, and again like the Amazon, the rainforest in Africa is being cut down at a rapid rate. Huge trees, centuries old, are cut and loaded for export. Often only a single tree trunk is enough to fill a giant logging truck. These logs are exported by sea to Europe,

Asia, and North America, to be made into furniture, exotic flooring, and other items. Already, U.N. figures calculate that more than 75% of West Africa's original rainforest has been cut down in the last century. Enormous timber projects are now removing logs from all sides of the remaining Congo Basin forest.

Meanwhile, the local people, who are subsistence farmers and hunters, gain almost no benefit from the taking of the trees. Nor are the trees replanted in an effective way, despite some countries having reforestation laws on the books. Unscrupulous foreign companies can cheat local villagers who may be illiterate, unaware of the consequences of logging, and powerless when promises are broken. Companies also pay off unelected or corrupt officials with bribes to turn a blind eye to what is happening. Furthermore, enforcement of laws is weak when the enforcers are few, ill-trained, and lacking basic equipment and vehicles beyond a bicycle.

S.M.A. and other Missionaries, along with our Church leaders, are worried about this situation. Sometimes Missionaries are involved in reforestation projects. More often, they attempt to raise the consciousness of the local people to the value of the forest and the economic conditions that rob them of any benefit



Photo courtesy of Greenpeace

Above: In Congo, logger's children stand in front of afrormosia logs chopped down by their father.

Left: Map showing remaining uncut rainforest in Africa.

from logging. As people living in North America, we also can respond. One way is to avoid buying exotic African woods used in flooring or furniture unless they have been certified as produced in a responsible and sustainable way. Our future as well as Africa's depends on it!

(See more information at www.fsc.org, www.mongabay.com and www.greenpeace.org.)

Stephen Price



What motivated Msgr. Melchior de Marion Bresillac's life and mission?

In Msgr. Bresillac's own words to his seminarians, he says:

"The joy I wish you, that which must be the faithful companion of our work, is the joy of heart, the joy of a pure conscience, the joy of a servant who loves his Master and who rejoices in working for Him. It is the joy of a vocation which makes us feel at home wherever the Lord sends us. It envies nothing, desires nothing, regrets nothing, because it has only one desire in the world: To do what God wishes and nothing else.

2009 marks 150 years since the death of S.M.A. Founder, Msgr. Bresillac