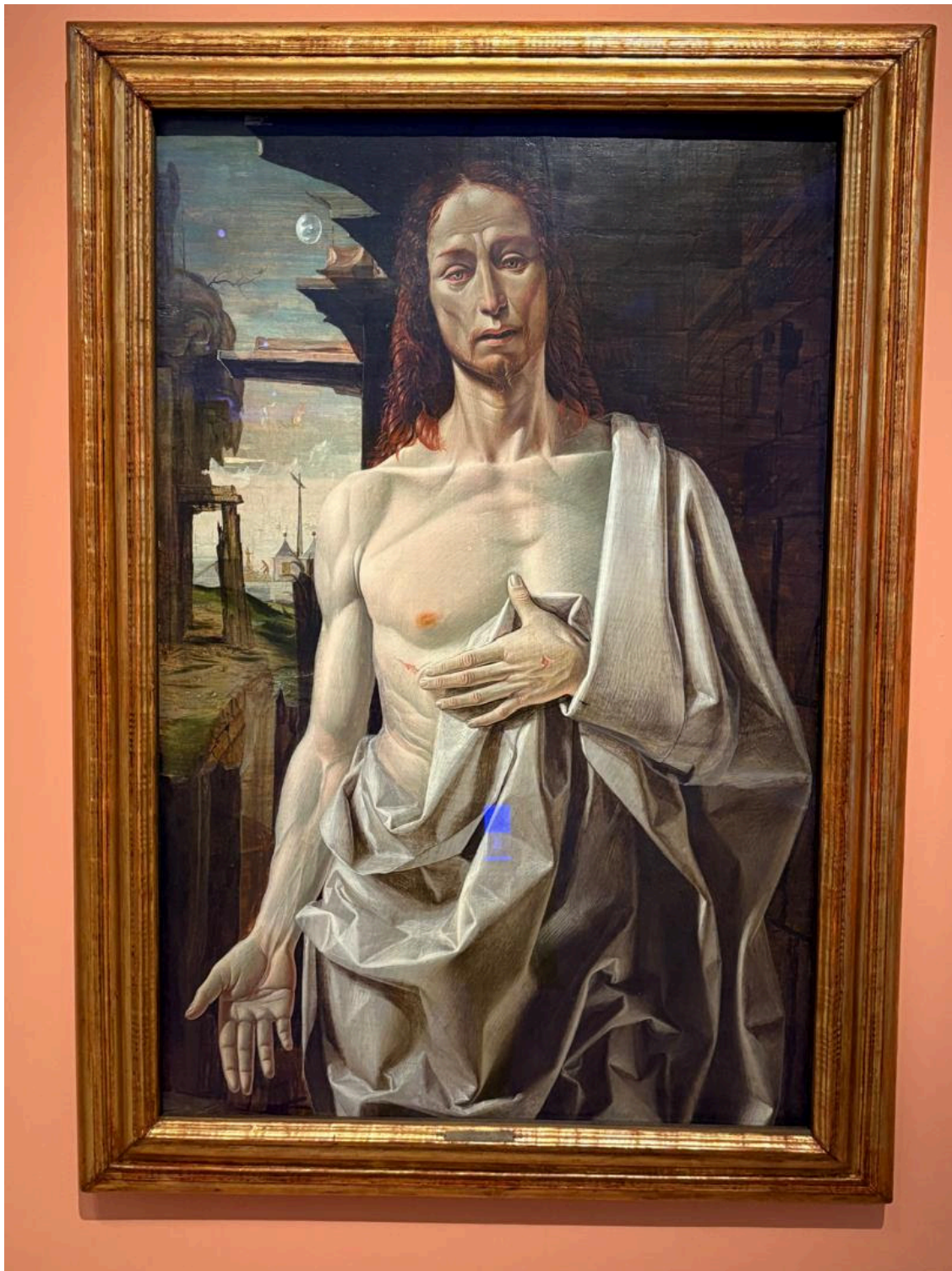




Dear family and friends,

As we have made our way through the weeks celebrating Easter, Ascension and soon Pentecost, the sufferings in which we accompany the Haitian people are the farthest you can imagine from being joyful and consoling.

Since Lent began in March, many farmers, young and old, have been killed in their fields in Berlot (Kenscoff Mountains). A whole family was burned alive in nearby Pernier. Four members of a parish youth group were hung by their arms from the

Church rafters in Carrefour Bert (Kenscoff Mountains), and one of the security agents from our orphanage was brutally killed and his body burned in Furcy,

These are terrors just from only the past few weeks, and only some of those near us. We are in our fifth year of these vicious attacks by gangs on the population, country wide. Imagine the depth of the national suffering.

It is often hard to deal with the vast distance between the promises of faith, and the way life really is. Especially at Easter, contrasting the gold ornamented, exquisitely orchestrated, and exalted values celebrated during the Easter liturgies, and on leaving the church, the painful, dreadful and unbearable oppression the terrorized people are enduring.

Maybe you also feel this distance for other reasons. May you are reeling from some pretty horrible experiences in life, like a severe accident, a devastating illness, an unbelievable betrayal, or a family tragedy.

Nine weeks ago, during the third week of Lent, we had an incident in our area that is not at all unusual, in Haiti under gang rule. We heard rounds of powerful gunfire nearby, and straight away we heard from a close neighbor that their vehicles had been hit in the exchange, and that a badly injured man was carried off on motorcycle.

Through our usual chain of contacts, I sent to ask the crime boss in our area what was going on, if this was an attack against our neighbors, and who it was who was taken away injured. We learned it was not against our neighbors, it was a kidnapping that had gone wrong and led to a shootout.

The answers helped us orient ourselves, and to gain a chance to dialogue to try to start bartering with the gang, humane exchange for humane exchange, for the victim.

Trying to trade good for good, even with the worst people and in the worst circumstances, is better than shrugging off an incident as none of our business. During his earthly life, Jesus walked the hot sands, even talking to demons as necessary.

My request was simple. Let me come into your territory for this injured man. After all, we just saved your young pregnant cousin from the preeclampsia that would have killed her and her baby.

An answer came back very fast on Whatsapp, in the form of three pictures.

They showed evident gunshot wounds under the chin, in the left arm, in the stomach, and on the right leg. It was also obvious the man was a foreigner (more valuable for ransom).

I could not determine if he was dead or alive, nor could I see his face well enough to guess his nationality (at least by what continent he is from).

It was very troubling, and I sent another message requesting access to get him. Hours went by, and I was told by the crime lord, "he is not my case, I cannot give him to you."

At three o'clock I tried again, putting this pressure. "In his physical state there are no such thing as a 'case owner'. He will die, if he is not already dead."

I was told bluntly, that in any case, ransom money from the family is often even higher for a corpse. He cited the example of the Kenyan soldier killed those very days in central Haiti, and the amounts being discussed to recovery the body,

I started to feel a pit in my stomach, and desperation that we would not succeed. I certainly could not pay any ransom to free him, even if i wanted to save his life. I bartered on how we had saved the gang leader's cousin.

I could not rest knowing situation of the victim. I sent a message again at 5pm. "I beg you. This is not humane. Let me come to your area for him. The sun will set soon and it will be too dangerous in the dark."

Word came back, "if he were mine I would give him to you. I wouldn't ask you five cents for him. But he is not mine."

What an ugly, despicable world.

I tried a last time at 7pm. This time not by message. It was a personal phone call. I spoke directly to the gang leader and asked again to give me the victim. I said I would accept now even to come in the dark.

He said very strongly, "you have asked 50 times and I gave you the answer 50 times, and if you ask again I will tell you the same thing for the 51st time."

I hesitated and said, "for the 51st time, let me come and get him."

He said, "what part of my answer don't you understand?"

I said, "I don't understand why you insist on being wrong, and I cannot accept your answer."

That was the end of that, very sadly. I had to accept he would die.

Weeks passed.

On the day after Ascension Thursday, a man came to the gate and sent word that he needed to see me. I send back to ask to it was. Word came back "it's the man who was shot seven times."

I said cynically, but not without some truth, "I don't know anyone who wasn't shot 7 times. I need more information than that."

He sent word back, "He was shot near the embassy". Sadly, even that didn't narrow it down. Too many people are shot on the streets near them embassy.

So I invited him in for a coffee. It was the foreigner, whose wounds I had seen on Whatsapp, but whose face I had never seen.

He said his name is Amir. He is in his fifties, with greying hair, from Iran. He explained he is a Bahá'ís, a highly persecuted religion in Iran, and so he has sought work in other countries for years. In Haiti he is an engineer. He told me he worked with the company of our friend Georgia, and he was one of the engineers that built our St Luke Hospital. He showed me all his wounds.

The he started to cry. Deep, deep sobbing, head in his hands, telling me about the terror of that day he was shot, how upside down his world had become, how monsters with huge guns were holding them against his head, screaming at him for the phone numbers of his family, promising to blow his head off if they didn't get a huge money from his family.

All this as he was slowly bleeding to death.

He told me he was thinking of his wife, his three children, wondering what he ever did wrong to deserve this. He was in hell. Like a piece of useless dung, worth nothing, he was dangling from a frayed chord over a raging fire.

And then he explained that another "chief" showed up. And the attitude toward him and treatment of him started to change. He was brought to an "off road", gang controlled hospital. He was given live-saving care. Though still a captive, still a pound of flesh to be sold, he knew he would live. After eight long weeks, he was

freed by some level or ransom paid for him by his friends.

And he was looking for me to thank me. I am not sure of the connection, but he associates me with saving his life. I only made a thread of phone calls to plead for him, but it seems my calls cracked the hard wall of evil enough, to let some of God's light in, and make enough of a difference to save his life.

On that same day of his visit, the day after Ascension Thursday, I received the image attached below from a friend visiting a museum in Spain.

This unusual image of the Risen Jesus is unlike anything that I have been challenged to understand. It was painted over 500 years ago in Milan, by the famed Bramantino.

It is an image of the Risen Christ. The wounds are evident on his hands and side. I am very drawn to learn and share what this image teaches, and especially what it represents today for the unspeakable distress of the Haitian people. The astute comments below from a site called mydailyartdisplay.uk.

"I feel uneasy when I look at this image. This is not a portrayal of a triumphant Christ having risen from the dead. Yet, this is a man who has passed through death and is now no longer part of this world.

Look at the luminosity of Christ's skin. Also, the burial shroud over his shoulders, and the body of Christ, seem to emit light. His face is gaunt and haggard and bears testament to his mental and physical suffering he has had to endure. There is a distinct look of sadness in his reddened eyes. He looks directly at us with a penetrating and hauntingly pained look.

We are stopped in our tracks when we first cast our eyes on this image. Without the histrionics of bloody gore, our attention is drawn to the emotional and psychic suffering endured by Jesus in his great and redemptive suffering."

The classical understanding of why our Lord's glorified body still bears his physical scars, is that His wounds are precious to God, and sacred for all eternity. By His wounds we were saved. It also means, our wounds are precious and sacred to God, and will be glorified in eternity.

But this image reveals even more: that our mental, emotional and spiritual wounds are as precious to God, and as sacred, as our physical wounds.

I mentioned feeling the divide between the promises of faith and daily life.

Jesus also speaks openly about this huge divide. He says that we will grieve while the world rejoices, but our grief will turn to joy. We will even forget our grief altogether, as a mother forgets her labor pains when she is finally holding her baby lovingly. (John 16:20-24)

I understand this to mean that the Resurrection for the souls of the farmers lying dead in their new-growth fields (fresh and green are their pastures where you give me repose), is the glorious and eternal victory for their souls.

But I also understand it to mean that for Amir, for the Church people hung from the rafters who were finally freed from their kidnapping, for the daughter of our killed and burned security guard whose name was Emmanuel, that even though they have Ascended from Hell, the glory of heaven cannot yet be theirs. They are still on this side of the grave. The image below can represent any one of them. Frazzled, anguished, bewildered, embattled- but not abandoned by the kindly light of God.

For us on this side of the grave, the Resurrection is not yet a victory, but it unlocks and empowers our soul, with eternal consequences. We find the Divine fire we need to achieve the rigorous work of our body and soul, to suffer greatly when we cannot avoid it. We grow in the art of living, and learn the art of dying. We learn to carry within us what is joyous, victorious, exalted, and sublime - even as we pass through the darkest night, alone or together.

The image below is Jesus before the Ascension. Jesus who is recorded by St. John as being very worried to leave us alone by returning to heaven. He prayed for us, he knew what evil would do to us, what the sinful and unrighteous world would do to us.

His consolation, which would become ours, was the Holy Spirit of God, whom He pledged would descend upon us and abide with us- to guide us, fight with us against evil, show us how to build a world of justice, compassion and peace. A kindly Light to be with us forever. This treasured gift we will celebrate in a few days, at Pentecost.

It is the beautiful, subtle Resurrection light that is ours for now. Until death. Barely luminous through us and around us.

Our task is to share it. Not to shrug the circumstances of the world off as "none of our business."

Our goal is to be used by God, in any and all ways, that might allow His light to get through the cracks of evil, with or without our awareness, even if it's by a phone call. God knows what to do in darkness, and how we can help.

We need a drastic change in Haiti. The people need to be saved from this grueling

catastrophe. But until that happens, Wisdom 17 assures us that an oppressive night lies heavy upon those who do evil, and even heavier than this darkness are they to themselves.

“But the world shines with a brilliant Light, and continues it's work unimpeded.”(Wisdom 17:20)

Let each of us be determined to be bearers of light, whenever and wherever we can.

Thank you as always for your precious support of our work.

A blessed Easter, a blessed Pentecost, and enjoy the summer months.

Fr Richard Frechette CP DO
Port au Prince
June 4, 2025



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