

November 29, 2010

Jambo from Moshi, Tanzania

We (Nathan and Stan) arrived in Tanzania Saturday night to 80 degree temperatures, a sky glistening with the beautiful yet unfamiliar stars of the southern hemisphere above, and the gentle breezes coming off Mount Kilimanjaro. We heard it was 18 degrees and cloudy in Chicago. Perhaps your future winter vacation plans should include a visit here? ☺

We started off Sunday with Father Val, who had arrived in Moshi several days earlier, celebrating mass in Swahili at the Mailiisita village parish church. Being the only Wazungu (white people) in a church, recognizing only the occasional Swahili word, and having the whole congregation look at you and laugh when Father Val finishes telling what is no doubt some joke at your expense...never gets old.

After mass and over lunch with the Mailisita parish priest, Father Raziki, Father Val shared with us an encounter he had on Friday with one of the children attending 1st grade at our school. Before leaving for Africa just before Thanksgiving, a St. Joseph's parishioner and longtime supporter of the project with health challenges of his own approached Fr. Val eager to find a very poor child who would need assistance. Father Val told him of the "Watoto Club" we had setup for sponsoring a child's schooling and meal expenses and that he couldn't think of any need for something outside that program for assisting the kids. But the parishioner was insistent, gave Father Val some money and said, "find me a Maria that I can help". Val prayed and prayed..."where am I going to find a special need worthy of his generosity?" He inquired of Father Raziki as to who among the poor children was really seeming to struggle terribly...and was named "Maria" of course. The two fathers along with the school head mistress Mama Lucy considered the request and Mama Lucy knew of such a child, but her name was Catherine. Mama Lucy sent for Catherine and she sat and spoke with them...in English.

Father Val: "What is your name?"	"My name is Catherine"
"What grade are you in"	"I am in the first grade"
"Who is your father?"	"I don't have a father"
"Who is your mother?"	"I don't have a mother"
"Where did they go?"	"they died" (and she started to cry)

Fathers Val and Raziki and Mama Lucy started to cry too.

While her school supplied uniform was neat and clean, Fr. Raziki noticed that her shoes were too small and all but disintegrated. They learned that Catherine lives with her elderly grandmother who barely has enough money to survive herself, much less care for a beautiful child. If only her name were Maria... Father Val asked her, "are you sure your name is not Maria?" She answered, "no, my name is Catherine...my middle name is Maria."

The children smile so much, it is easy to not see the pain they carry with them.

We have a busy week of meetings ahead of us including: the architect and construction manager to discuss status and estimates to complete the project, a local furniture manufacturer to solicit his bid for making furniture for the guesthouse, Mama Lucy to discuss school progress and the budget for next year, the Bishop to thank him for his continued support, KCMC and Kibosho clinics to deliver medical supplies, and Fr. Kawishe and the Tanzanian NGO board we established for directing the project on an ongoing basis. Whew...I'm tired already!

Kwaheri mpaka kesho,
(goodbye until tomorrow)

Nathan, Stan & Father Val

p.s., "watoto" is Swahili for "children". The "Watoto Club" is the name we use to refer to people who are sponsoring children at the school. When completed, the guesthouse will earn enough money to pay for the children's education and meals, but until then, the Watoto Club have been carrying the load. With 40 new 1st graders getting ready to start school in January, there are many new opportunities for sponsorship!