

**November 2, 2022**

## ***Roma v. Sluma***

*In June 2000, I traveled to Italy to attend a month-long study pilgrimage to Assisi and other places that played a significant role in the life of Saint Francis.*

**June 7, 2000, Rome, Italy:** During my annual visits to Rome since 1995 to teach my month-long film writing course at the Pontifical Gregorian University, the streets of this vibrant city never failed to excite me. I loved just walking around the city, taking in the sights and sounds. I loved Rome's style and grace . . . and its flair, which all too frequently bordered on excessive. During all those visits, I walked the streets for endless hours, always seeing more and more. The pulsating energy of the city energized me. The art, history, and beauty of the city inspired me. The people and fashions were an infinite source of fascination. But none of the allure of any of these things interested me this time. I walked the streets for about four hours during each of the three full, free days I had before the pilgrimage began. I walked from Sant' Isidoro (a Franciscan friary where I lived) to the Vatican at least six times, always taking different routes, never retracing my steps.

As I covered the familiar ground, an unfamiliar feeling shadowed my steps: apathy, detachment, dislike. Today, as I walked down the Spanish Steps, stepping past hordes of tourists soaking in the sun and quickly licking giant scoops of delicious melting gelato, I asked myself why I was not feeling my usual sense of excitement over the visual feast spread before me. I didn't understand my lack of enthusiasm for a city that has never failed to inspire and invigorate me. Then it hit me: crazy as it might sound, I'd rather be walking in the slums of Nairobi or Manila or Calcutta.

After spending so much time in the slums of so many impoverished cities, I was able to see below the surface of the glamour and style of Rome. I also saw clearly the huge gap between the "haves" and the "have nots." The slums showed me the true face of humanity; Rome showed me the masks that cover our humanity. In the slums, I saw real life, laced with struggles and simple pleasures and extraordinary acts of kindness; in the slums, I felt the love and mercy of God. In their poverty I saw my poverty. In their need I saw my abundance. The poor showed me the beauty of simplicity and the power of love. They showed me what real courage and determination was. In Rome, I saw how truly superficial life can be, people hurrying from here to there in hot pursuit of money, power, sex, fame, glamour, and personal gratification; store after store enticing you with things you really don't need in order to deaden the pain you are hardly aware exists because you are so busy. Cell phones, short skirts, silk ties, gold jewelry, diamond rings, leather purses, antique furniture, luxury cars, fine wines, gourmet delicacies . . . so many goodies on display, creating so many desires, so much anxiety. Life is blur, a merry-go-round of sights and sounds. I'll take the harsh reality of the slums.

*As I read those words on June 17, 2022, as the sun rose in Haiti, I wished I could be whisked off to Rome for just a week of indulging in gelato and pizza in between visits to a dizzying array of art-filled churches. The violence in Haiti had drained me of all my energy...I simply wanted to escape to somewhere vibrant and beautiful. A short time later I reconnected with an Irish Franciscan friar in Rome who invited me to spend time at Sant' Isidoro to refresh and rejuvenate my soul. I was very excited to return to the place of my conversion back in 1995 where the direction of my life dramatically changed and put me on the road to Haiti after spending time in massive slums in Africa and Central and South America.*

*During this trip to Florida, I spent three full days reviewing the typeset interior of the Merton book. It was tedious work. I found at least four dozen minor errors. I made a few changes. Of course, I added a few words. But throughout the reading, I was constantly reminded that I really needed time away...in silence and solitude. The reading reaffirmed my decision not to go to Rome in March but instead to go to Mepkin Abbey in South Carolina. I hope to firm up the dates before I return to Haiti next Sunday.*

## ***A Broken Home***

*With the final review of the Merton book behind me, I hope to carve out a little time before return to Haiti on Sunday to enjoy the beauty of creation that abounds on the island. I did my civic duty last Saturday and voted early in the upcoming midterm election. While Florida eliminated many drop boxes to make it easy to cast your vote, early voting was still possible. I was in and out in about five minutes. The fact that I cast my vote for some candidates that will not win is irrelevant.*

Each day we grow more disconnected from the earth. The ecological crisis we are experiencing is self-created. We have thoughtlessly and ruthlessly plumaged the planet we share, our common home. Carbon reduction and loss of biodiversity threaten us all, with the poor being hit the hardest. Greed and exploitation have the upper hand thanks to social media pumping out rivers of false stories and a steady diet of misinformation and baseless conspiracy theories. Elections in America are joining a host of endangered species. Lies are repeated ad nauseum until they become the truth while we are struggling to pay for the gas we need to get to work. We are not separate beings. We are a diverse, multilayered family sharing a broken home. We need to downsize. Quickly. We can live and even thrive on much less.

*"The artificial separation between humans and cosmos is at the root of our contemporary moral confusion."*  
—Teilhard de Chardin

## ***Nonviolence & Love***

*"Martin Luther King Jr. defined agape love as willingness to serve without the desire for reciprocation, willingness to suffer without the desire for retaliation, and willingness to reconcile without the desire for domination." —Richard Rohr*

*"Martin Luther King Jr.'s Principles of Nonviolence," Oneing 10, no. 2, Nonviolence (Fall 2022): 47, 48*

*"For me, nonviolence is that quality that comes out of all the great world religions: the notion that the creative force of the universe is love, that God is love, and that love is all-encompassing."*

—James Lawson

John Dear, "Nonviolence Is Power: A Conversation with the Rev. James Lawson," *Oneing 10, no. 2, Nonviolence* (Fall 2022): 24.

*"This love ethic must be at the center of our whole life, or it cannot be effective or real in the crucial moments of conflict. We have to practice drawing our lives from this new Source, in thought, word, emotion, and deed, every day, or we will never be prepared for the major confrontations or the surprise humiliations that will come our way." —Richard Rohr*

*"Martin Luther King Jr.'s Principles of Nonviolence," Oneing 10, no. 2, Nonviolence (Fall 2022): 48–50.*

***Breaking News:*** Baby tested negative for Covid.