

Father Sam's Journey to Kenya 2009

by Father Sam

The last time I was home was about four and a half years ago. This journey was special because it was the longest time I had lived without seeing my parents, brothers, sisters, and friends. The flight was long as I expected from Chicago to Georgia, Amsterdam, and Nairobi, Kenya. When I arrived in Nairobi, my priest friend was waiting for me with a big smile and a big hug. And the first word that came out from his mouth was "You got small." I looked at myself and said to him, "No, I'm big." Then I remembered that I was in Kenya and losing weight is not a good thing in Kenya because it's a sign of depression. I told him I was okay and felt healthier this way. I slept in Nairobi and left the next day in the evening. I could hardly sleep at night because of the time difference. Kenya is eight hours ahead of U.S. It took me three days to get used to the time difference. I had some business to take care of the next day, and then I headed home.

It was three hours of driving from Nairobi to Nyahururu. My dad kept calling me every thirty minutes asking where I was. I arrived home, and my dad, my mom, my brothers, and my sisters those who were home came out and everyone wanted to give me a hug at the same time. It was so beautiful. I felt so good. I went around all of them calling each of them by name. And I found that there was one lady I did not know. She looked very different, so I thought she was a guest. I asked her, "Who are you?" And my sister gave me that look asking, "You do not know me?" So I looked at my other sister thinking she was her friend and asked, "Who is she? Is she visiting you?" Everybody didn't say a word. They just looked at me with wonder. Finally, my mom said, ". Did you forget your sis, Lucy?" The last time I had seen her was when she was in 4th grade and now she's in 9th grade. I was very apologetic to my sister and gave her a big hug. Then we went to the sitting room, opened the gifts I had brought for them. Starting with my parents, everyone was very happy. Everyone waited for the gift. However, I immediately noticed that I had bought the wrong sizes of shoes for my sisters except for one. The girl I didn't know at first, Lucy was the only girl who was able to wear 3 out of 5 pairs of shoes, and she was very happy.

Then they asked me about U.S., people, snow, and animals. They wanted to know about everything. But most of all, they wanted to know about the parish. I had all these wonderful stories about you. Then I wanted to know about them. My mom had cooked chicken with , potatoes, and colored greens, Chapati made out of wheat like tortilla, because that's my favorite food at home. We all ate together after four and a half years. You can tell how good that felt. After eating, we played some games. Someone from U.S. had given me this game called Sequence. My family was so good. They could hardly stop playing it. The next day, my dad took me to the farm and I saw how much cabbages he had farmed. He told me the stories about the rain and all the other problems of farmers facing this year, such as lack of rain and elephants visiting at night looking for food. I took my parents out for lunch, so I could spend some time with them. The next day I wanted more time with my sisters, so we went out to the city and spent the whole day together. It was a lot of fun. I did the same to my brothers. I had to take them out at a different time because they couldn't fit all in my car at the same time. For those who do not know, I have 8 sisters and 6 brothers. We can make every ball team.

I discovered that I was not able to make a phone call to U.S. because the phone system in Kenya is different from U.S. I had a difficult time even getting to a place to write an email because the

place where my parents live is in the farm. There is neither electricity nor running water. They use all sorts of natural resources to live. It felt different not taking a shower every day.

On the weekend, I went to see the parish place that was eagerly waiting for me. My priest friend welcomed me to the parish, which was 15 minutes away from my home driving. He asked me to help him serve mass in 3 out of 7 churches. In Kenya, the parish is made up more than 1 church, which is called outstation. Pondo Parish (my home parish) has 7 local churches 45 minutes between 1 out station to the next. I accepted his offer and I was so happy driving from one outstation to the next. People were late for mass and they were very surprised even to see me there. I went to one outstation and I only met two people waiting and they were not expecting a priest. Before the end of the homily, the church was full. By the end of the sermon, 40% of the people left the church and moved to the next outstation to wait for me there because they had missed the most beginning part of the mass.

I have a lot of stories to share about the churches I have visited. I hope that I get a chance to share with you upcoming years. I did enjoy visiting the schools, talking with the children, and helping some of them who are in great needs. I was amazed to find out some of the kids didn't have uniforms, shoes, and food. (Every student must wear a uniform in Kenya.) Thanks to the money that St. Gilbert children that had given me to help the kids in Kenya and I used the most of it to help these children.

Let me now share with you some of the fun things I did for entertainment. For the first time in my life, I was able to play golf in Kenya. It felt so good. The Knights of Columbus had paid for my golf clubs to travel all the way to Kenya to make sure I play golf at home. Thanks knights. I played golf with my friends who do not know how to play it. They just wanted to watch me playing; they went to the golf course for first time in their lives. The fun part of it, each shop was perfect for them. Meeting my high school, college and even youth group friends and doing some fun things together, mostly sharing our stories was lots of fun. Driving around and seeing animals of every type, please do not ask of their names because I'm very bad at names, but it was so beautiful. I visited an orphan school for girls where some of the kids' parents died of AIDS. I did spend some time with those children and shared with them the love of the children from St. Gilbert. I plan to work more closely with that school project in the near future because those kids do not have parents except those people who volunteer to work and live with them. It was very humbling to be with them. I played soccer with them.

There are several pictures I have put up on the website. I hope these pictures will help you have a taste of Kenya. I also hope that some of you will visit my country and see for yourself what kind of place I come from. My parents, parish, and people of Kenya send the greetings to you.

