

Desert Blooms

March 19, 2006

Dear Sisters,

Yesterday was an all-time high for our Santo Niño Project in Anapra. We saw 22 children! At one point there were four new families in the waiting area, plus our regulars and an assortment of pregnant women, others seeking medicine for sick children and still others asking for used clothes to sell.

The new arrivals included:

Alan Xavier, a fourteen month old with cerebral palsy. His mother has had four children but only two survive: a 12 yr. old daughter and Alan, whom she told us was born "in the street". He started having convulsions when he was four months old. He is blind but seems to be able to hear. "He likes music, especially when I sing to him."

Maria Teresa, age seven years, was brought by her grandmother who has been the sole caregiver for her and a younger brother since the parents disappeared four years ago. The child's mother was only fifteen at the time of her birth and the pregnancy was troubled from the start. Maria Teresa weighed just two and a half pounds and was hospitalized for several months. She is a delightful little girl who requires help for all daily activities. The grandmother heard about our services through the mother of one of our other children. They came on the bus to the center of the city and then took a taxi to Anapra (a cost of \$15 which we paid for her). Fr. Bill drove them home afterwards and said it was an incredible journey. We have recently acquired a 2004 Ford van to transport our children and will have to figure out the best way to use it to accommodate those who live at such a distance.

Oscar, age 7 yrs, was born two and a half months prematurely. He also has cerebral palsy but is able to attend school and he is learning to write his numbers with his left hand. His vision is impaired and he lacks coordination in his arms and legs.

Life was normal for Cinthia, age 13, until last November when she began to lose strength on her left side. Tumors were discovered in her brain and upper spinal cord and she has had surgery to place a shunt to relieve the pressure in her head. The tumors are apparently so large that there is no possibility of removing them. Now Cinthia cannot walk without assistance and although she seems to understand, she has difficulty with speech.

These are just the thumbnail sketches we were able to get yesterday in our first encounters. What opportunities they offer us for reflection in this third week of Lent, witnessing to the suffering of Christ in the least of these sisters and brothers. We remember the admonition of St. Vincent: "It is only for your love alone that the poor will forgive you the bread you give them." And the joy of Elizabeth Seton "at the prospect of being able to assist the poor, visit the sick, comfort the sorrowful..."