

Ailish O'Brien rsm shares her experience of Build it Week 2011

A few weeks ago at Sunday Mass, we heard the Gospel of the Samaritan Women at the Well. My reflection that week led me to think about water and how it is so necessary for the quenching of our human thirst, and to dwell on the wellsprings at which Jesus quenches our thirst for God. Our choir in Rowlagh parish that week sang the hymn 'You will draw water joyfully from the Wellsprings of Salvation' for the opening of the Mass.

It was good to reflect on water and to be grateful for the availability of it here in Ireland.

On Saturday morning April 2nd, as we queued at Dublin airport to check-in for the flight to Haiti, Haven staff handed around envelopes of essential information for the volunteers, such as bag labels, a book of health and safety guidelines, an essential French and Creole dictionary and other documents. As I read the letter in my envelope I discovered that I would be on the water team during the forthcoming Build it Week.

Initially I was disappointed as I had offered my services as a painter, but decided to accept the assignment as the one which was right for me.

Being a member of the water team in Haiti during Build it Week entails carrying around a bag full of bottles of water and trying to ensure that all the volunteers drink plenty of the life giving water during the day. Dehydration was to be avoided at all costs, as temperatures reached as high as 48 degrees on some days and everyone was working hard in the intense heat.

I had never really realised how heavy water is and had plenty of time during the days to think about the unique task that was assigned to me and the nine others on the water team. I decided that I would try as far as possible to 'draw water joyfully' as the hymn said, and be a happy water carrier.

We never actually built a wall, added a roofing sheet or painted a house, but our work enabled the others to do that. We had the wonderful opportunity of meeting every person on the site and chatting with them as they took a welcome break to drink some water and relieve their thirst and exhaustion. I also had the privilege of being able to capture the daily developments on site on a small video camera as I walked around with my bag full of water.

One of the days, I joined a group who were visiting the homes of two families who would move into the new houses on the Haven site. That day, we were asked not to bring bottles of water with us as we visited the families. Water suddenly had become a sign of great wealth. Catherine McAuley's words 'Water is a free beverage' came to my mind and I realised what an unequal world we live in.

Being a volunteer on Haven's Build it Week 2011 was a wonderful opportunity, enabled by your generosity, and the donations of all those who contributed to the effort. We participated in this wonderful venture on behalf of all of you.

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