

From Hodari to Maliku

We set out on a rainy Friday morning to Kitui... with a small troop of boys who, myself included, had not painted anything bigger than their own rooms, if they had painted anything at all.

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Our trip to Kitui was an extraordinary one! We all arrived in Hodari by 8:00am and prepared our packed lunches with Kevin's help. Then we set off at 10:00am although

we were to leave at 8:30am. Yes! We too are in the struggle to keep time! Sometimes we win – this was one of those times we didn't.

We took our lunch at Machakos town as the rain poured and arrived at Kitui town where we bought a few more things for the trip. With the rains, the half hour trip to Maliku from Kitui became an hour and a half. Our host for these days was Roy and his family. We arrived at his mum's home around 6:50pm. On arriving we were greeted by Roy's mum, his sister and his nephew Gad. That evening, after a dinner of some very delicious fish, Roy brought out a cake and Mama Roy was greeted with a warm singing of "Happy birthday!" She was delighted to say the least! Tummy's full, adventure mode on, we turned in for the night. Then Saturday came.

There is no doubt that everyone knew the amount and weight of work waiting for us, so we took a heavy breakfast and headed off to the church to begin painting. Part of our encouragement to dive into our work was the really big goat we left being prepared for our dinner. The church was called St. Mary's Maliku Church which was a short distance from where we stayed - about 7 minutes walking, two minutes by car.

Arriving at the church we were greeted by the chairman of the church and the lady catechist. There was also a local painter – Mbandi – there who guided us in the job we were doing: before painting you have to move the furniture (the pews) away from the walls, lay out newspapers on the floor and then sandpaper the walls. In this entire process of cleaning and clearing out the church we killed a scorpion (no

one got hurt). We did the actual painting in three groups: those with the rollers, those painting the windows and those painting the gate. With the rollers, we had covered all the inside walls by the time the catechist brought out some tea for us. As you can imagine, some of us were covered with paint in the most curious fashion... perhaps some modern artists might learn a few ideas from us.

Then we started the more careful, more detailed work of painting the patterned stone windows, the gate and the metallic doors. Each stone window would average 45-50 minutes for a good job. So we did all the interior side and finished off the exteriors after lunch. For lunch, one of the girls there served us some very soft muthokoi cooked in a pot. The day was a long one but we managed to finish the inside of the church and then headed home. We had a movie

together while eating a hearty dinner and then went to bed.

The next day was Sunday which served us a surprise during Mass in the very church we had painted the day before. Let me explain. We had all expected to have Mass, but instead since there was no priest available, we had a service which was presided over by the lady catechist in Kikamba leaving us all perplexed! As expected, we were invited to introduce ourselves at the end of the service and the congregation was very happy with our work. We too thanked them for helping us out.

After Mass we went for lunch and came back to finish the “small” job we had not finished. It took us at least 4 hours! We dressed in our work clothes, brush in hand. This time, the boys really outdid themselves and their mettle really

showed. They did an impressive job painting every possible angle that they reasonably could touch up with their paint brushes.....many which will not be seen by anyone... especially keeping in mind that the last time the Church was painted was in 1992, when the Church was completed some 31 years ago. The doors needed another coat of paint and the altar needed a special blue paint which was oil based, so we agreed with the painter to complete those in the next two days, but overall, our work was done. That evening, we had a very sumptuous dinner from Mama Roy's kitchen: pilau, goat meat, macaroni, potatoes...

Monday came, we packed up our belongings and after breakfast bid our host goodbye and thanked them for taking good care of us. Roy's mum gave us a blessing and sent us off warmly, saying how impressed she

was with the boys, their discipline, their hard work, for proving that her house could actually accommodate the boys and how she will miss them as we had already started to bond with each other..."But you should come back so that you see the animals, the farm..."...so... let's see. We said a response at the gravesite of Roy's father who died in 2021 and at 10:00am made our way to Museve Shrine for Mass and to make our pilgrimage.

At Museve, we had Mass at the lower chapel with an altarpiece which is a bass relief of the Pieta of Michelangelo together with a group from Strathmore University that coincidentally happened to be there. Father Patrick Musili's preaching was like a nail on the head as he spoke about the sanctification of work and devotion to our mother, Mary. He also invited us to explore the surroundings.

After Mass, we said the main part of the Rosary atop the little hill with an image of Our Lady, with the stations of the Cross which was overlooking the shrine. There, we prayed for many things, saying the decades of the Rosary in turns for our families, for the country, for our benefactors, for our friends... We then left immediately for Kitui town where we spent some time before we could see Roy's grandma, Rosalia, whose husband, Joshua, had passed on the previous week. When eventually she came, each of the boys greeted her and to our surprise, she gave a 'token of appreciation' to be shared among the boys! I had never gone to comfort the bereaved and received something from the one bereaved! Soon after, we were back on the road home and we grabbed some lunch in Machakos town. It was truly a work of grace as the boys' smiles and also, quite tangibly, the marvelous paint job can attest. We were and are truly

grateful! We thank God for protecting us and for the support of the parents. May God bless you all!

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