

## **This is the Holy Door... in the Year of Mercy**

I'm writing this in Rio. My son Joe heads the Brazil team hosting the Street Child Games - which is an event using the opportunity of the upcoming Olympics, to do a Street Child Olympics, putting a spotlight on street children to advocate on their behalf and to stop them being rounded up when international events are on.



*Garth in Rio overlooking Penha*

Gill is a volunteer at the games so I'm over to support her and Joe and the team - but mostly to focus on writing a book!

Today I took time off the book and joined them in a favela called Penha. Here Joe and the team have been working for months building a much needed football pitch for young people in the local community. This was sponsored and fully financed by Chevrolet cars. Penha is a favela experiencing 'pacification' – this means the police come in heavily armed and they meet the response of the drug lords - also heavily armed.

Joe met with the police and the drug lords and both agreed they supported the pitch and so they would keep violence away from it - they kept their word but of course bullets don't always go where they are meant to go, and all the time they were building the pitch, shooting could be heard in other parts of the favela.

Today it was exhilarating to see the young people of the community being trained, some of our group of visitors joined in and played football with them – it was a moving time. As the joyful and happy game went on we could hear gunfire in the background. Our driver told us there was a part of the favela we could not go to today.



*Santuário de Nossa Senhora da Penha - The Church of Our Señora da Penha*

To get up to the pitch we had been supplied with moto taxis – that means you ride on the back of a motorbike – better than the huge steep climb. Nevertheless it was hairy for those of us who haven't been on the back of a motorbike for a long time! Though it was quite exhilarating – around 12 bikes taking us all around, down and up the steepest of hills.

Before lunch we went up to a remarkably high Catholic church (high in being situated on top of a hill – nothing to do with ritual!) Here outside this beautiful church was a sign that pointed to the door and said “This is the Holy Door in the Year of Mercy” – beautiful words sparked off by

Pope Francis calling for a year of mercy – what could be more important in our brutal and violent world.

**But I also interpreted these words as parabolic – wasn't what we had just seen at the football pitch also 'the Holy Door leading to mercy' and a future of possibilities for young people of Penha.**



**Acts of hope are ‘a Holy Door’ bringing the chance of dignity and the possibility of a way forward in a context where the odds can be stacked against all in the community.** Both on the T-shirts the young people were wearing, and on the mural was a slogan that asserted “I am somebody”. This is the message of hope for all of them that there is a better way, they are of value and their lives are of meaning.

The church we visited was called ‘Santuário de Nossa Senhora da Penha’. When we left it we were on the back of our bikes again. Mysteriously Joe called out as we were leaving, "Keep your knees in!" In a matter of seconds we saw why - we were going down steps that wound between buildings in the narrowest alleyways one could imagine. It reminded me of a scene in 'The Italian Job', where minis are driving down steps! Brilliant driving - I don't know how they did it. Now where's that risk assessment?!

Then off to have lunch in the community with the young people who had been playing football – despite language difficulties they gave us such a welcome – I think somehow we had been through a Holy Door and were refreshed by it and we pray and hope that they have too and that this will be an ongoing encouragement to them.

## **Domingo de Ramos - Sunday of the Branches**

It was the eve of Palm Sunday, or Sunday of the Branches as they call it in Brazil. In Our Lady of the Rosary they were preparing for the Sunday procession, and I was right by the favela (called Babilónia), where the Street Child Games participants and volunteers were staying. It's a steep favela built up a hillside, but I appreciated that the event was based here as it brought people into the local community.

It was what would be described as a 'pacified' favela - this means the police will have gone into it and gone head to head with the drug lords and eventually hopefully things will calm down. In fact for four years Babilónia had been at peace with only the occasional shooting right up at the top, between gangs.

But then shooting started to break out in the favela whilst everyone was staying there, which was unexpected and very worrying. And on the eve of Palm Sunday as I passed 'Our Lady of the Rosary' at the foot of the hill up to the favela I heard a close rattle of gunfire, soon followed by an extraordinary procession of heavily armed police with the biggest guns that I have ever seen (they are armed in a militarised way) and they came in on motorbikes and on trucks, pointing their guns as they came.

And I had a strange sensation as I thought of the City of Jerusalem and the way Jesus rode in on the Sunday of the Branches - he deliberately chose the non violent way, legs dangling over a donkey, and from the other side of the city would come the procession of the empire, waving banners and weapons, coming on warhorses, proud of their military prowess, bringing hostages with them - keen to show the power of the empire.

And at Babilonia the police came in like a procession - the empire came to town.

It's not a simple situation - the police are fearful, they have just said goodbye to their families. And the drug lords are also using the methods of violence and domination. **Suddenly the Palm Sunday procession seems to make a lot of sense - a prophet riding on a donkey to set us free; going to the centre of power, but not with weapons, to show us a lifestyle of community - that there is a better way to live.**

---

Brazil is struggling politically - there have been big demonstrations while we've been here - and struggling with different favelas where there was violence. **On the Sunday of the Branches was what Walter Wink calls a piece of acted out street theatre by the prophet of peace to show us a lifestyle of hope.**

How we make that a reality is complex, but as I looked in every situation in Brazil, whether in favelas or well-to-do areas, there are churches everywhere, and so full, and on Good Friday I saw people outside crowded churches – it was if the crowds were bursting out. **Good Friday is saying, enough blood has been shed - reject the way of domination; and then Easter Sunday affirms the way of Jesus - join the non violent procession working for a community of peace.**

We live in Britain in a country committed to armaments, making money out of them, selling them to terrible regimes who use them to abuse and dominate; and the message of the prince of peace is ignored year after year, and the parabolic style of entry on Palm Sunday is copied but we are not always committed to it.

**We have a choice - there is always a choice. The choice is always to do with protecting and benefiting the few, or working for the community.**

## **Choices**

### **On the eve of Sunday of the Branches**

There was gunfire in the favela  
As holy week drew close;  
It was the night before Palm Sunday  
I heard guns - I saw the smoke.  
The police came like a procession  
On motorbikes and trucks -  
With the biggest guns you ever saw  
The empire came to us.

And somehow on the hillside  
I hoped that I would see  
A procession with a prophet  
On a donkey to set us free,  
From our Lady of the Rosary  
A revolution that began  
With a ride to the place of power  
As the humble danced and sang.

The choices seemed quite stark  
As Holy Week began –

Gunfire with the empire -  
Or peace on earth with the son of man.

### **Prayer**

## Palm Sunday

Jesus, bringer of a new way to live  
What a sign - riding in gently on a donkey  
Welcomed as the Son of David  
But he was the warrior king -  
You refused a war horse and chose the donkey  
You came in to Jerusalem as the peace king  
Not really as a king - perhaps the prince of peace  
Olive branches symbolising peace were waved before you  
This is a new world order - not the power of weapons  
But the power of love  
Not one who conquers with violence  
But one who sacrifices rather than defends himself  
Jesus, bringing of a new way to live  
You have given us a sign  
And a way to follow  
That heals and brings hope

*Garth Hewitt*



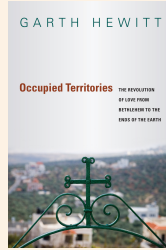
The Strange Weapons Tour kicks off on April 15th with Garth's Wolverhampton gig - more than 16 concerts booked around the country with more still being added, so check [Garth's website here](#) to find details of the one nearest you



*follow Garth on  
Facebook*



*Get your copy of the  
latest album [here](#)*



*Buy Garth's  
book [here](#)*



*follow Garth on Twitter*

---

©2016 Garth Hewitt Foundation | 186 Hykeham Road, Lincoln, LN6 8AP

[Web Version](#)

[Forward](#)

[Unsubscribe](#)

Powered by [Mad Mimi®](#)  
A GoDaddy® company