

COR Newsletter – 23 April 2008

Dear all,

Last Sunday in Sofia

About a dozen of us gathered in the lovely little chapel in Oborishte to celebrate the Eucharist. Jonathan was feeling ill so Sharon, from the US embassy administered the chalice. After coffee we all departed for a walk in beautiful sunshine through central Sofia passed the Alexander Nevsky cathedral, the Archaeological museum, the Russian church, Roman ruins and ended up in a restaurant called "ETNO" whose cuisine had an Armenian flavour. We passed loads of people carrying branches and flowers and leaves and it took me ages to make the connection that this is of course Orthodox Palm Sunday (Doh!). This became very apparent when we later met up with Mira (Gino's wife) who was wearing a headdress made of them after visiting the Greek Catholic cathedral. It was a lovely day and after lunch Claire and I drove back to Romania in the new chaplaincy car (see John's Blog via our website <http://www.churchoftheresurrection.eu> to see what it looks like)

Last Sunday in Bucharest

Dr. John Barker, our reader led and preached and we are thankful to Reverend Steve Hughes for presiding at the Eucharist while I was in Bulgaria. I have spoken to John who reported an excellent atmosphere, even while the Easter holiday season has temporarily depleted numbers.

Next Sunday

I am taking a week's holiday from today to next Wednesday so John will take the service again next week. **Holy Communion** at 10am as usual. Frans, our Sunday school teacher and the family are still on holiday but there will be **crèche facilities** in the kitchen.

New table in church

A big thank you to the anonymous donor who paid for a **new table** for the church. This is sorely needed especially on produce sale days. It is already a good size but can extend into a truly monster table.

What a handsome bunch you all are!

Not a week seems to go by without a new addition to our website <http://www.churchoftheresurrection.eu> and now we even have pictures of you lot - complete with captions. Have a look to see if you are there (and if we have spelled your name right). Click onto the picture gallery and then on to "our congregation in Bucharest". We are going to supplement that material with some pictures of the Sofia congregation soon and the Britannia Ball as soon as we can lay our hands on the material. Check out at the same time John's Blog on "COR Blog" which is always interesting and now also has pictures of the new chaplaincy car and Orthodox Palm Sunday in Bucharest.

Driving to Sofia in the new chaplaincy car

We only got lost a few times - starting early by even missing our turning off the Bucharest ring road - whoops! Still - all's well that ends well. Gino, in Sofia had given us good directions but once we arrived at the Sofia ring road the fun really started.

Sofia shares with Bucharest a dislike of clear signposting (a strange foreign habit obviously) and street names are conspicuous by their absence. It was lucky that my basic command of Cyrillic managed to decipher "Dragalevski" well hidden on the very road itself that I saw at the last minute. Veering across the traffic we were in the right area at least but finding the right road took a long time after careering around narrow lanes and asking various bystanders (Why is it that everyone you ask is either foreign themselves or feigns complete ignorance?).

What a relief it was that we found ourselves in the right road by complete accident. We found the right house and when we were greeted by a grown woman wearing a Bunny rabbit costume we *just knew* we had found a fellow Anglican. Sharon - for it was she - had been entertaining children at a US embassy function and had just got home herself. Claire and I were overwhelmed by kindness and hospitality. Sharon has a lovely Labrador called Honeybelle and is keen that she should meet Toby - my dog. So next month we plan to go as a family with Toby as well!!

Thought for the day

As the ex-pats amongst our congregation know, being a "stranger in a strange land" is something we all live with daily. But Peter's first letter in the New Testament also speaks of *Christians* being "strangers and aliens in the world" (1 Peter 2: 11) in a phrase that echoes one of the psalms.

Being marooned on the Sofia ring road with Cyrillic signs and talking to people who speak a different language, have different reference points, different culture, and faced with uncomprehending stares - the phrase "stranger and alien in this world" was thrown into sharp relief.

Being a Christian in the world really does have similarities with being a Brit lost on the Sofia ring road!!

There is a certain sense of dislocation, of being almost semi-detached from things going on around you. Being surrounded by people speaking a different language we don't understand. We feel apart from things. We feel....well very *different*. Even old hands with good language skills will still miss many of the nuances. It is in these circumstances that birds of a feather usually flock together as they say. Clubs centred around nationalities that have moved abroad are commonplace - such as the British club in Veliko Turnovo in Bulgaria for example.

Christians are strangers in a strange land according to the Bible and it never ceases to amaze me that if were not for the church hardly any of us would ever have had cause to meet each other at all. The church is a very special place where high and low, people from all walks of life, different personalities, different nationalities meet together and get to know each other often bound by nothing in common whatsoever except for our shared faith.

This is a wonder in itself.

What binds us together is exactly what makes us strangers to many of our fellow men. It is being able to perceive a deeper reality to life - being able to see that what appears on the surface is not all there is - but that there is an eternal dimension to the apparently finite world we live in - in short we are bound together by the belief that God not only exists but He is loving and is living and active.

We are bound by the belief that beneath the surface differences we are all held together by the one God - by the one spirit. The reading from 1 Peter last Sunday which stopped just one verse before the "strangers and aliens" quote was full of wonderful imagery - a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people like living stones being built into a spiritual house. A home away from home you might say. The

church is, amongst other things, a place where those of us who feel at odds and slightly frustrated that most of our fellow men don't perceive the same things that we do and don't look at things in the same way - in fact it sometimes feels like we speak a completely different language and others can dismiss the depth that we believe we all have to our existence as an illusion. Our dislocation, our being strangers in a strange land is a mirror of our experiences of being a foreigner in a foreign country. And just as we need to know *some* Bulgarian in order to make some connections and really communicate - so we need to understand the language of the average man on the street to understand where they are coming from and communicate with them. Meeting people where they actually are rather than where we think they should be is very important. I know this from experience because it was only a comparatively short time ago that I was met where I was and a Christian really communicated with me by speaking my language.

The short but poignant **Prayer for the day** is taken from a book called "Lent and Easter wisdom from Thomas Merton" compiled by the Merton Institute for contemplative living.

***My God, help me to see the beauty and mystery in every person
and to respond with love and joy to your presence within them.
Amen***

Love and Peace

Martin