

COR Newsletter – 11 June 2008

Dear all,

Last Sunday

A robust congregation with a sizeable Sunday school this morning. I thought we sang really well and welcomed, as ever, some new faces. John and Ela were in Skopje this weekend so Lillah administered the chalice. This service took place in the middle of the Verona street festival, and I trust you didn't miss the new addition to our street - the statue and drinking fountain outside our church. The title of the piece is called "Motherhood" and depicts a child sitting on their pregnant mother's bump while the child is spearing a serpent - I think it fair to say that it has divided opinion (!) as all works of art do. As soon as Jo and John are back we'll get some pictures of it on the web site and Blog. Because the workmen were using our water and electricity to erect the statue and because of its proximity to the church, many Romanians who visited us on Saturday during the festival thought that it was us who had the work commissioned, so I feel I must underline the fact that in fact, it has nothing to do with us.

Monday

We pray for **Stuart and Ana** who had their wedding blessed in our church today at 1pm.

Next Sunday

I will be in Bulgaria celebrating communion with our sister congregation in Sofia. Dr. John Barker will lead our worship in Bucharest. Holy Communion with Sunday school at 10am as usual.

Piscu

Bless you. But seriously, this is the name of the village where the artist who sculpted "Motherhood" is based. Virgil Scripcariu and his wife Adriana have their studio in a Romanian village renowned for its clay. They also write books and have their own website, which they would like to be linked to ours. If you would like to find out more about these artists go to www.piscu.ro. Everything is in Romanian, which is no good for me but will be no problem I'm sure for many of you.

Hai Romania!

I received an email from one of our great stalwarts, the journalist Alison Mutler, from the press box at the Zurich Letzigrund stadium in Switzerland on Monday. Alison was there to cover the match between Romania and France - in fact the entire tournament - for Associated Press. Alison went to the protestant church in St. Gallen (the location of the Romanian team camp) on Sunday but was late and arrived just in time for the blessing - Good to know that the Romanian way is now being exported to the West!
To Alison and Romania - Success!

Bishop David Hope

will preside at a Eucharist next **Thursday the 19th June** at 6.30pm. Let's all make the effort to be there and welcome him.

The British Garden party

Be there or be square! **Friday the 27th June** from 7pm onwards. Get your tickets from me at church!

A game of two halves!

There is a famous quote by the great Liverpool manager Bill Shankly which goes. "Football isn't a matter of life or death, it's more important than that" which gives a flavour of the tribal passions that can be roused by supporting a team. There are a lot of football & religion analogies - my favourite being;

"The church is like a football match - 22 people running around badly in need of a rest, watched by 50,000 people badly in need of some exercise".

The tribalism can be compounded when football and religion really are mixed - the most obvious example for Britons being the old firm rivalry in Glasgow where Rangers have always been identified with the protestants and Celtic with the Roman Catholics. Add a racial or ethnic divide into the mix and you really do get a heady brew and violence is never too far away.

In international football, the rivalries have been likened to war without bullets where fixtures accrue a history of their own, as well as bearing the weight of *actual* history. When England play Germany for example, it is not just a game - there is something else which has nothing to do with an actual football match bubbling just beneath the surface.

In Folkestone I knew a man who supported Manchester United with fervour than was truly evangelical - Old Trafford was Holy ground and at that particular time the Holy Trinity were Alex Ferguson, Eric Cantona, and Peter Schmeichel if I remember rightly.

Football does reflect and embody all the best and the worst of religious affiliation. There is the unconditional support of the team, but this is often counterbalanced with unjustified contempt for any other team. On the positive side, being part of the team takes precedence over what race, nationality or religion you are - for better for worse you are "one of us" when you play for us. For example there are some "English" teams that are foreign owned, foreign managed, and with hardly an Englishman in the team but are still, despite all evidence to the contrary reckoned to be "our" team by their English supporters. For the committed football fan - all these "outsiders" are merely drafted in and welcomed to fight "our" corner against "them", whoever they may be (usually the team from the other side of town).

Our church is a melting pot of different races and nationalities and denominations - all playing on the same side. If we shared even half of the passion that football often evokes we would be doing well - but we need to be wary of the irrational flip side of that - being lulled into thinking that the "others" outside our team are automatically our enemies to be opposed at every turn and that everything they do must be automatically wrong.

In supporting a football team there is I think a powerful element of wanting to be a part of something bigger than yourself - just like religion, something that existed before you were born and will survive your death, but something you were an integral part of in your life. In reality of course the only real connection between a fan and the team is that he gets to pay for a ticket to see them play once in a while and his much more real connection is with the other supporters when they congregate together, sing together, and share the successes and failures of his side together.

In the church we aim for that sort of community togetherness, but not at the expense of irrationally hating others and whereas the football team you support doesn't know

that you even exist, the object of our worship *returns* our love and devotion - in fact he loved us first. Ours is not a distant connection but a direct and intensely personal one.

I like football a lot, but it is not more important than life or death.

The prayer for today was written by Dietrich Bonhöffer while awaiting his execution in a Nazi prison. Short and profound.

***Lord, whatever this day may bring,
Thy name be praised.***

Love and Peace

Martin