

COR Newsletter – 16 July 2008

Dear all,

Last Sunday

Our Eucharist took place against the backdrop of Jesus' parable of the sower which makes it very plain that accepting the gospel and allowing it to bear fruit in our lives is never a clear unambiguous choice made in a vacuum but can be affected by a range of social and environmental factors. The good news can be hampered by simply not understanding the message, or being afraid of the consequences of commitment, or having the good news squeezed out of us by the trials and tribulations of life. Any and all of these can happen to anyone - and this includes churchgoers - there is no immunity. On the positive side we are also included in the scenario in which the seed takes hold and flourishes and bears a lot of fruit. We pray for the latter, even while those other things may be playing out in our lives.

Next Saturday

We pray for **Irvin and Andreea Dyer** as their wedding is blessed in our church this coming Saturday.

Next Sunday

The ninth Sunday after Trinity. Holy Communion at 10am. I will be in Sofia celebrating with our sister congregation. Dr. John Barker will preside at the service in Bucharest.

Prayer and study group

A few people have asked when a new group will start up. I had been so busy with the necessary Garden party organisation that unfortunately this took a back seat. After the summer heat has passed, a group will convene probably in September. My thoughts are turning to making this not strictly a Bible study group but a study and prayer group. It occurred to me that we spend a lot of time talking "about" God, which is OK and not very much time talking "to" God. We will cover different forms of prayer but I especially want to introduce contemplative prayer to people if they have not experienced this kind of thing before.

Bishop's visit in 2009

I have booked the Bishop in Europe, Geoffrey Rowell for 2009. The dates are the 18th -21st June. So the **21st June** will be the date when any **confirmation** candidates will be confirmed - so please put this date in your diary now. More information on confirmation after the summer holidays are over.

A truly "world wide" web

One of the more surreal moments of the week was getting an apology for absence from the church council meeting from the **Amazon rain forest** (the lengths people will go to to miss a church meeting never ceases to astound me). But seriously **Sarah Winslow** - she is on our weekly prayer list all the while she is away - is trekking alone in Peru for eight weeks. Her most recent communication was sent from a town in the Amazon with no road or rail access. She got there by a very overcrowded boat, sleeping in a hammock on the deck along with a host of others destined for a shaman festival. I have seen these on TV. Participants get drugged and a trance like state is

induced where they believe they can walk in the "spirit world". Sarah says she will probably give it a miss!!!

I also received a note from **Martin and Joanna Symms** who are now settled in to their new apartment in **Tirana** in Albania. They have shown this newsletter to a new Orthodox friend of theirs who was amazed at the content (I'm assuming in a *good* way!!) because the incoming Greek-trained Orthodox priests (The country is 60% Muslim - and 40% Orthodox but there are hardly any Albanian Orthodox priests) never talk to their people in this way and so now we have the beginnings of an Albanian audience - Hello Albania!!.

A date to remember

Sunday 27th July - John's last Sunday with us in Bucharest with a farewell BBQ afterwards.

Questions, questions ... just some of the questions that I have been recently asked. If you have anything you would like to know about Christianity, the church, our practices and beliefs, profound or mundane, don't be too shy to ask - because I probably don't know either(!) but I will try to find out if I don't.

Q. Why do we have candles on the altar? A. So we can see.

Strange but true. There is no theological significance at all to candles on the altar - except the inevitable man made superstitions that grow up around such things. The original reason was simply to give light in a pre-electric age. All the same, candles are "nice" and atmospheric and are also used to accompany and represent prayers. The obvious "light in the darkness" symbolism makes them a ready outward sign of a prayer which is why many people like to light one as a visible sign or representation of a prayer having been said.

Q. What is that funny scarf thing I wear in church. A. This is called a stole.

As far as I am aware it is supposed to represent the "Yolk of Christ" and is worn because the ordained person is representative of the entire community and we are all yoked to Christ. Funnily enough it is the minimum item of liturgical dress acceptable when one of the official sacraments (an outward physical sign of God) is being celebrated. I could dispense with just about everything else - but I must wear a stole. (I suppose I could even be naked and still be properly dressed so long as I wore the stole - perish the thought)

Q. How many sacraments are there? A. You pays your money and takes your choice

The Roman Catholic Church from whence we derive most of our hang-ups - ahem sorry...traditions - counts seven sacraments. Baptism, the Eucharist, confession, marriage, confirmation, last rites and ordination. The protestant churches, including the Church of England (article 25 of the 39 articles - Anglo-Catholic traditionalists take note!) counts only two - Baptism and Eucharist - because they are the only two mentioned in connection with Christ in the New Testament. The Orthodox church is more fluid and whilst not exactly disagreeing with the Roman church says - why bother to count and name them, isn't that all a bit finicky and legalistic? After all, the whole world is capable of exhibiting the presence of God; in fact all creation is a sacrament.

My own view is very Orthodox on this one. We live in a sacramental universe - God is present in all things - and if we describe a sacrament as something that reveals or manifests the presence of God, then for me, a mountain stream in a meadow in the Alps can actually just as readily reveal the presence of God than anything "official". Knowing this fact could in fact release people from thinking that they can *only* find God in a church - and widen their vision to see him everywhere and in everyone - though mostly *veiled*. The things we call sacraments in church, now that I think about it are in fact special "unveilings" of God's presence in very particular ways but those ways are not exhaustive by any means.

And finally, a topical question...

Q. How will the C of E's decision to admit women to the episcopate (allow women to be bishops) affect our relationship with the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church?

A. The big picture - Not at all. They weren't in communion with us before and they're not now!

At the local level, time will tell whether this may affect local agreements and cooperation in any way at all. I hope not obviously, but when push comes to shove we must have the courage of our convictions and stand up for what we see as a genuine prompting of the Holy Spirit. As I have said before, we have absolutely nothing to be ashamed of - In my opinion, it is they who are wrong, not us. We cannot keep deferring to Rome or the Orthodox world but rather, we have to be confident in our own understanding of the gospel. The longer I am in Romania the more I realise that they have far more to learn from us than us from them.

A very short thought for the day courtesy of Bill Bryson

Do you realise that if you were picked apart, atom by atom, all that there would be left when finished is a pile of trillions of dead atoms - not one of which has ever been, is, or ever will be alive?

Yet put them all together and they make ... you! Isn't God mysterious and wonderful?

The **prayer for today** is actually a collect for Remembrance Sunday so, as such, is a prayer for the reconciliation and peace of the world.

*Almighty Father,
you call your children
to live as brothers and sisters,
in love and harmony,
and have given your Son to be our saviour,
the Prince of Peace:
grant that we, who are called by his name
may yield our lives to his service,
and strive for reconciliation, understanding, and peace
in all our relationships;
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen*

Love and Peace
Martin