

COR Newsletter – 23 July 2008

Dear all,

Last Saturday

Weddings are always lovely affairs but they are even more special when they involve people from our own congregation. At 1pm on Saturday **Irvin and Andrea Dyer** had their wedding blessed in our church. We had not one but two professional singers in church. The male singer sang some Orthodox prayers and the female singer gave a spine tingling rendition of "Ave Maria" during the signing of the register. We pray for Irvin and Andrea and the whole family.

Last Sunday in Sofia

There were a fair few regulars who I knew would be missing this weekend so as you can imagine, I was absolutely delighted when we nevertheless managed a congregation of twenty people in Sofia. Half a dozen of them were a party of backpackers from the **Czech Republic**. They were all Roman Catholic and initially I thought they had strayed into the service by mistake - but no! They had just walked from the station after a 25 hour train journey (ouch) from Prague. They knew exactly who we were because they had found out via our website, liked the sound of us and decided to come to our service before trekking off to the Pirin Mountains! With a new family from the USA and a new Dutch family (who know our own Van der Ents) it made for a truly wonderful service. We ended with a rousing singing of "Amazing Grace". On days like this, it all seems worthwhile. Our website address is <http://www.churchoftheresurrection.eu>

Last Sunday in Bucharest

After the service, John had to drive directly to **Chisinau in Moldova**, where he will be for the rest of the week - but we have been in brief email communication and John reports a smallish but prayerful service in Bucharest.

Next Saturday the 26th July

We pray for **Simona and Dan** who will have their wedding blessed in the COR at 5pm.

Next Sunday in Bucharest

Holy Communion at 10am. **Sunday 27th July** is John's farewell to Bucharest as a permanent resident, and before he departs for Skopje. As John is unexpectedly in Moldova until next Saturday we will plan the service by email. Of course, John will choose the Hymns and deliver the sermon. I suspect the church will be packed so I'll put out some extra chairs.

In a great act of generosity the **British Ambassador is providing his residence** for the farewell party and BBQ which will immediately follow the service. I'll provide directions at the end of the service.

Last night's concert in the COR

In collaboration with the Swiss embassy we hosted a concert titled "**Telemann and baroque Europe**" by the Meridiana Ensemble of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis from Basel, Switzerland. This had been put together only in the last week but came together beautifully. About 100 people came to hear these young musicians - two

Swiss, one Swede and a British girl from Wembley. A technically flawless performance was followed by a range of Drinks and cocktails - courtesy of the Swiss embassy.

Today - Wednesday 24th

I have an appointment to see Adrian Wilson in Rahova prison so I am not available in church today.

Coffee after the service

Daniela and Iulia, who normally serve the coffee after the service, are planning to be in Denmark for the next two months. I hope everything goes well for them.

Meanwhile, back in Bucharest - who is going to step up to the plate and do the honours, which includes the washing up? Fellowship with a cup of tea or coffee after the service is an integral part of the whole idea of fellowship so this task must not be underestimated. You also get the warm glow that comes from knowing you have served your fellow man!!!! The ideal situation would be a rota so that the same person wasn't landed with the job week after week.

Stand in organists required for August

More help of a different nature will soon be required. There are two dates in August when **Florin**, our regular organist will be on holiday - I will confirm these two dates with him on Sunday. Is anyone prepared to play for us when he is away? I know of at least a couple of people - no names no pack drill - who I'm hoping will volunteer without having their arms twisted too hard. Whoever volunteers - we will choose the Hymns together - so we are both confident before the services.

Thought for the day - who are you calling evil?

During my stay in Sofia the subject of Iraq came up. It is clear that there is no single American view on this subject (as the American presidential election proves all too well), despite what we are sometimes led to believe, and of course as the main player in the conflict by far, Iraq is a hot topic in the USA. But for most of the rest of us, the most terrible thing to say is that we all, myself included, against our better natures, have become bored with Iraq. This may be a terrible thing to say but what is even more terrible is that it may be true. What does it say about us?

Can we only stay concerned for so long before compassion fatigue sets in?

Have we become so deadened to the carnage that we no longer really care what has happened, how we got there and what it means on the wider world stage? Why is the plight of millions of internally displaced people more likely to make us yawn and turn the TV over than make us feel guilty as complicit in their plight? Perhaps the enormity of the problem leaves us floundering. Perhaps we feel impotent against forces we cannot control. After all, on the eve of the second Iraq war, one million Britons marched against the war to absolute indifference from the Government that had already decided a long time beforehand to go to war alongside the US Government. We know we are powerless to change anything - so it is easier to just turn away. But does our silent acquiescence now make us complicit with evil?

It is estimated that up to half a million Iraqis have been killed since the invasion of Iraq. A secular country that was an *enemy* of Al Qaeda. Two million have been internally displaced. The official line is (now that the WMD excuse is known to be untrue) that the Iraqi people were being helped to free themselves from a brutal Baathist dictatorship (Baathism is a kind of pan-Arab socialism that was actually

devised by an Arab Christian) - yet one million Iraqis have had to seek refuge where? - the apparently brutal Baathist dictatorship of Bashar Assad's Syrian Arab Republic. Part of President Bush's "Axis of evil", Syria, one of the poorer countries in the world has absorbed *one million* (yes **ONE MILLION**) Iraqi refugees and has to feed and care for them. The refugees have free access to Syria's health and education systems (My God aren't they just sooooo evil!!).

Meanwhile, the numbers of Iraqis given official refuge by all the coalition countries that caused this disaster is pathetic. We appear to want war without consequences or at least let someone else deal with the consequences. The figure of 500,000 dead is a figure that also seems to slip easily off the tongue. I get the distinct impression that nobody in the Western halls of power really cares. I have heard no heart rending expressions of regret, just limp platitudes - which is a damning indictment of the west and our so-called enlightened values. Officially we went to war to defend innocent people from tyranny and to protect human rights - we were liberators. Human rights and the dignity of human beings? - Fine words but what was the reality? Iraqi deaths were at first not deemed even worth counting and the ritual and sexual humiliation of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison disturbed and shocked the world - or did it? Perhaps the West is now so spiritually dead, the "spiritual desert" spoken about by Pope Benedict in Australia last week that we don't really care about that either. Perhaps our moral compass is now so warped that we cannot tell what is right or wrong any more. In the eyes of the world, especially Arab eyes, we have been exposed as charlatans, only interested in getting our hands on a safe supply of oil and making sure that an implacable enemy of Israel was neutralised. And a sad consequence of this is that many people in the Muslim world associate the West with Christianity so when they see unprincipled aggression, Iraqi deaths treated with indifference, sadistic treatment of prisoners, and officially sanctioned torture in Guantanamo Bay - that is their view of Christians. We are tarred with the same brush. Happily, for the moment, Christians, Muslims, Druze and Alawites, and one million Iraqis of various faiths live in comparative safety in that "evil" secular country Syria - who if it wasn't for Iran would probably be next on the West's hit list while the enlightened, compassionate, democratic West, of which most of us are a part, continues to live in denial, largely indifferent to the suffering it has caused. The shortest verse in the Bible is apparently "Jesus wept". My God, he must be crying his eyes out now.

The **prayer for today** is a form of confession from the Book of Common prayer.

*Almighty God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Maker of all things, Judge of all men:
We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness,
which we from time to time most grievously have committed,
by thought word and deed,
Against thy divine Majesty,
Provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us.
We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for our misdoings;
The remembrance of them is grievous unto us
The burden of them is intolerable.
Have mercy upon us, Have mercy upon us,
most merciful Father;*

*For thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake,
Forgive us all that is past;
and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life,
To the honour and glory of thy name;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Love and peace

Martin