

COR Newsletter – 30 July 2008

Dear all,

Last Saturday

The weekend got off to a great start with the wedding blessing of **Dan and Simona** at 5pm in church. We pray for their future life together.

Last Sunday

About **104 people** packed into our little church on Sunday for the farewell service for our reader, **Dr. John Barker**. The collection broke all records as well! Although tinged with sadness, this was a celebration - firstly of God's living presence amongst us as always, but secondly a **celebration** of John's ministry in Bucharest for these past four years. John spoke movingly of the highs and lows of living in Bucharest, which included the lows of being hospitalised after being beaten up by thugs and put on the spot by the German Lutherans during a week of prayer for Christian unity and of course the truly high point of meeting Ela, but that the real highs were the people and the Church of the Resurrection here in Bucharest.

At the end of the service the prayer I chose for John and Ela was a Jewish "prayer for travellers" - a prayer that will always mean a lot to me because of its associations with a parish pilgrimage to Palestine.

After the service we all enjoyed a lovely BBQ at the residence of the British Ambassador - the sun shone - and the Ambassador spoke of how much John had contributed to the Romanian nation via his "real" job at the EU representation and wished him and Ela well for their immediate future in Macedonia.

Next Sunday

Holy Communion at 10am. Please don't forget that this is also a **produce sale** Sunday (I forgot to mention it on Sunday). Please bring cakes and produce to sell. Lillah is not in Bucharest but has left pots of lovely home made marmalade to sell. We all have to add to that good start! **Sunday school** is still in suspension until the Van der Ent's return after the holidays. You will know if you were in church last Sunday that I kind of twisted Catherine's arm to play the organ for us this week because Florin is away and I want to thank **Catherine** in advance for agreeing to do so, especially as I know she is quite nervous about it! Let's respond by singing like we mean it!

It's a dirty job but someone's got to do it.

Monday morning, sun is shining, but that funny smell is still there! Well I found out what it was. Down our stairwell that leads to the boiler room I discovered amongst the rest of the rubbish dumped down there by the good citizens of Bucharest the decomposing remains of a cat. So Monday morning was spentwell I'll spare you the gory details....the bottom line is that the air should smell a bit sweeter from now on.

Another giant leap forward for humankind happened last week when Aurel from the embassy came round and fixed our toilet - Hallelujah!!, we can now flush.

And finally.....true to his word, yesterday John came and completely cleared the garden at the church! It looks great now. I wouldn't be surprised if some "before and after" photos didn't appear on John's Blog very soon. You can access the Blog by

going to our website <http://www.churchoftheresurrection.eu> and clicking on the "COR Blog" button.

Prayers for my training parish.

Before coming to Romania I spent four years at St. John's Margate. My training vicar, Brian has just had a heart attack, and our associate priest Janet has just retired this very week. I phoned today and so many of the people I knew are in hospital for one reason or another I think they could get a bigger congregation if they held the service in the emergency ward of the QEII hospital. Central Margate is officially an "urban priority area" - the 9th poorest ward in Britain -and so has multiple social problems to deal with. Let's pray for Brian, the congregation and the community they are serving.

Letter from Peru

Sarah Winslow, our wandering church council member, is now in Iquitos in Peru and attended the Shamen festival though she didn't drink any of the mind altering drug "Ayahuasca" also known as the "Mother Goddess plant" despite being pressured by others to do so. About twenty Californians did though and Sarah described the less than enlightening event that ensued; laying in the pitch black in the Amazon, listening to the Shamen chanting for four hours, accompanied by the sound of twenty people throwing up in buckets. Perhaps we could introduce this on a Sunday morning? Then again, perhaps not.

Thought for the day

"When you ain't got nothin' you got nothin' to lose, you're invisible now, you got no secrets to conceal" is a line from the Bob Dylan classic "Like a Rolling Stone". The truth of this line is always brought back to me when I get in to see Adrian Wilson in Rahova prison. Stripped of everything, including his dignity, alienated from all around him by language, nationality and the nature of his alleged crime, no privacy, precious few possessions, suffering verbal abuse daily (though mercifully the last physical assault was last year) Adrian is in a desolate place - and I don't just mean the prison surroundings. Mentally he is in a desolate place - metaphorically naked. He spends a lot of his time crying in the toilet where none of the other inmates can see him.

"Now you're on your own, with no direction home, a complete unknown, like a rolling stone"

And yet, when I see him and I have the opportunity to talk to a person spiritually stripped bare I am painfully aware that I am privy to more truth, more honesty, more insight, more candid unadorned talk than at any other time or place I can think of in my ministry, and speaking to a person so intimately in a cubicle (for his own safety) I feel I know Adrian better than I know just about anyone else in Romania. He is powerless, with no image to keep up. He often describes his position as being the lowest of the low. And as *he* would put it, "he is in the country with one of the worst reputations in Europe, and as a prisoner he is in the worst position in this country, and in the prison, as a sex offender he is at the bottom of the heap in prison too - the lowest of the low".

But his basic humanity and spirit remains fairly intact. His loves and hatreds are raw. When I saw him he had just come from court where he had successfully challenged the system and had won the right for all foreign prisoners to learn Romanian. Quite an achievement. He reads the Bible but it confuses him (join the club) and has no problem with me, but hates the hypocrisy of the church with a passion and has no

time for organised religion. He gave up on the Cof E a long time ago when the local vicar did nothing, despite appeals, to help his churchgoing Father after his mother died. He listens to the BBC on a radio and in fact was more informed than I was about the Lambeth conference. He "condemns completely" in his words, all people who want to exclude others on the basis of gender or sexuality.

Adrian knows all about prejudice and exclusion.

There are two ways that Adrian could go after he eventually leaves prison. He is a very intelligent man, and has it in mind to write a book about injustice and even told me of a daydream he has about starting a charitable organisation called "The silver lining" whose job it would be to bring some light into the lives - through acts of simple kindness - of desperate people who had lost all faith and hope in the decency of other people. If that were to happen, this would be an example of what my inspiration Fr. Harry Williams would have called "True" resurrection. Bringing good out of a bad situation is the experience of the central motif of Christianity in the here and now - true resurrection. Without the experience of resurrection now, the danger is that the resurrection is simply either something that happened two thousand years ago or something that might happen in the future after we have died - locked away either in the past or the distant future. But *True* resurrection is the experience of the power of the resurrection found in the midst in the grit, dirt, blood, sweat and tears of real life.

There is another way Adrian could go of course. Prison is a university of crime and he now knows all he needs to know about credit card fraud and people and drug smuggling and has already had "job offers".

The truth is though, although that choice appears more vivid and black and white for Adrian, it is the same choice all of us face every day. Do I choose the way of light, goodness, impartiality, the way of sharing, truth, honesty, acceptance, and making life enhancing decisions or do I lie, cheat, steal, deny, exclude and judge others - taking the death dealing, life denying option? True resurrection or true death?

Repentance is a daily challenge, not a once for all decision.

"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live" (Deuteronomy 30: 19)

This beautiful **prayer for today** is written by Brother Ramon.

*Today my Father,
let me be like a tree planted by the river,
bringing forth fruit in its season.
Let the sap of your Holy Spirit rise within me.
Let me not become dry and barren
but rich in abundance and fertility.
May many weary ones find refreshment
in the shadow of my branches.
Amen.*

Love and peace

Martin