

Dear all,

### **Last Sunday morning in Bucharest.**

We welcomed some new American visitors this morning and we all heard the beautiful "sign" in John's gospel of the turning of water into wine. This was supplemented by the enigmatic story of the priest king of Salem, and a portion of Revelation. So much to choose from but I majored on the reason John had for talking about "**signs**" rather than miracles. There is a good theological reason for this. Unless we are able to look beyond the surface jaw dropping spectacle of a miracle to what the miracle is actually *telling* us, or is *pointing to* - the *inner meaning* if you like, a miracle is unable to move us spiritually from where we were to another place. Calling the miracles "signs" doesn't alter the integrity of what happened - (In fact this method can sidestep all the dead end arguments as to whether something really happened like that or not) but invites us to look at what the miracle was trying to tell us. As a discipline I personally apply this method to all the miracle stories in all the gospels. Turning water into wine is the keynote sign of John's gospel, the sign to which all the other signs in the first 12 chapters of John refer to, and they in turn are all pointing forwards to the greatest sign of all, the sign of the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **Last Sunday afternoon in Bucharest**

WOW!! We were packed to the rafters. We ran out of service sheets ten minutes before the service and thirty or more people were forced to stand - some out in the foyer and on to the street. The Roman Catholic Archbishop was the senior visitor, with representatives from the Romanian Orthodox church, Greek Catholic priests, Armenian priests, and Hungarian and German reformed pastors. The service was conducted in English, Romanian and Hungarian and was a joy. There were the usual hiccups of course. Where Florin found the tune for that second hymn will remain a mystery!! - and then when something collapsed in the corner where the refreshments were to be served with an almighty bang half way through the Hungarian pastor's address causing the congregation to physically jump all at once. (It was worth it to see the normally staid black clad representatives of our brother churches all trying to stifle their smirks). Thank you to all those who helped both before, during and after the service. I was honoured that the catholic nuns asked my permission to use my sermon given at the Calvinaeum on Friday evening - "*the church as a place of healing*" - to present to a symposium. I was also pleased to see the Knights Templar again adding extra colour to the occasion. The most pleasing comments came from people who responded to the "warmth" of the Anglican proceedings. Anglicanism in the East is a small and exotic part of the whole to Romanians but our witness is unique and we offer something that none of the others can.

### **Next Sunday in Bucharest**

The fourth Sunday of epiphany. **Holy Communion at 10am.** With **Sunday school** and our monthly **produce sale**. If you have anything to sell in aid of the church - cakes, biscuits, preserves, anything really, please bring it along so the burden doesn't fall on just one or two shoulders.

### **Last Sunday in Skopje**

The brand new Anglican congregation in Skopje, the Macedonian capital, led by **Dr. John Barker** from a tiny base gathered eleven people last Sunday - and John tells me there are some great singers amongst them!! (I hope my daughter's electric organ that she donated to the congregation is giving good value) Emails from people wanting to join the congregation are also now arriving. Let us pray for this young congregation that they go from strength to strength. Just as in Sofia they gather by kind permission of the Roman Catholic Church - in Skopje in a side chapel of the cathedral - now twice a month.

### **Gaza aftermath**

Thank you to those who responded positively to my words relating to the suffering of Palestinians a couple of weeks ago. The current Israeli offensive is now over. About 1,300 Palestinians were killed. 400 were children. Over 3,000 were injured. The infrastructure is bombed to hell. Two United Nations schools were shelled. Red Cross/Red Crescent lorries were attacked by Israeli troops. White phosphorous bombs that burn the flesh were used. There is no water and no electricity. The population is still blockaded and aid is rationed. 10 Israeli troops were killed. And the BBC? They refuse to carry an appeal for aid to the people of Gaza in the name of *impartiality*! These people are calling their partiality against the Palestinians *impartiality*. Saying one thing and meaning another is nothing new of course and along with all the other stupid terms we are supposed to use like "insurgents" - meaning anyone the west doesn't like - and "collateral damage" - the killing of innocent men women and children, no wonder so many people are so cynical. Let's start calling a spade a spade shall we?

*Note: I saw the Robert Redford film "Lions for lambs" on HBO last night. I thought it was a startlingly good dissection of the war on terror and the attitudes of people both for and against. It was both thoughtful and thought provoking. If you get a chance - give it a go.*

### **The BRITANNIA BALL**

My now weekly call for your support will continue up until the actual week itself. We do **still need** Auction and Raffle prizes. We **need** you to be advertising the event and promoting sales. The main details, including the advertising poster can be found on our website <http://www.churchoftheresurrection.eu>

### **No newsletter next week**

Next week I have to travel to the UK to sort one or two things out in a whirlwind trip to Durham Diocese. Sunday services will not be affected but I am unavailable during next week, and of course there will be no COR Newsletter next week either. Sorry.

### **Thought for the day**

How many sacraments are there?

For those who are wary of too much physical contact, you will be mightily relieved that the "kiss of peace" which originally was a full kiss on the lips narrowly missed being made an official liturgical sacrament of the church. Can you imagine.....?.....No, perhaps not. So what qualifies as being a sacrament? It is here that exposure to Orthodox theology and thinking has expanded my point of view.

If a sacrament is an outward and visible "sign" (there's that word again) of an inner and invisible grace to use the usual explanation, doesn't that mean that just about anything can be sacramental? Well, yes it does.

But officially the Roman Catholic Church (and high church Anglicans) counts seven official or special sacraments. Protestant churches (and low church Anglicans, including the BCP) count just two - The Eucharist and baptism. Their rationale being that only those two have the warrant of Jesus himself and they are called the "dominical" sacraments.

My exposure to a more oriental frame of mind and Orthodox thinking though, leads me nowadays to ask the question - who's counting and why? Eastern thought, rightly I think, accuses the west of being far too forensic. The arguments that routinely split the west on what exactly happens in the Eucharist and when, have never tried to be exhaustively set down and explained in the east. They are content to leave it simply as a mystery.

But there is precious little room for mystery in the west. Increasingly there also seems to be less and less room for the natural ambiguities of life, the shades or grey, doubt, uncertainty. In these fractious times, people increasingly seem to want sharp divisions, black and white opinions and answers, to be told what to think and when to think it. Life is not quite like that.

Getting back to the question of what is a sacrament - that is, something that exhibits or manifests the presence of God - let's try taking off our blinkers and being a little more expansive. The glorious universe we live in, this precious and beautiful world we inhabit also show the presence of God and is indeed sacramental - it manifests God's presence. *"Holy holy holy is the Lord almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory" Isaiah 6:3.*

Anyone and anything is capable of showing forth the presence of God in some way, because there is no part of this creation from which God is absent. In point of fact if God was indeed absent from anything he would not be infinite, he would be just another finite being with limits. He is the ground of our being, not a faraway entity. There is no chasm to cross to get to God, He is with us already. *Luke 17:20-21 "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say "Here it is" or "There it is", because the kingdom of God is within you"*

This understanding of the presence of God in all creation is the basis of my sacramental understanding of the universe and everything in it. Everything. Think about it! What do we use in the official sacraments of the church? The ordinary things of life! Bread, wine, water and oil. But in the hands of God, to those who see and can perceive they can become carriers of God's grace - the ordinary becomes extraordinary. The acid test for us of course, the 64,000 dollar question, is not so much whether we can perceive God in a piece of bread or a cup of wine, but can we see Him in each other?

This **prayer for today** is an ancient Irish prayer and I found it in a Roman Catholic prayer book. I think it is beautiful. It combines the earthy with the divine, everything made by God offered back to him in love.

*I offer thee  
Every flower that ever grew,  
every bird that ever flew  
every wind that ever blew.  
Good God!*

*Every thunder rolling,  
every church bell tolling  
every leaf and sod.  
Praise God.*

*I offer thee  
every wave that ever moved,  
every heart that ever loved,  
Thee, my Father's well-beloved.  
Dear Lord.*

*Every river dashing,  
every lightning flashing,  
like an angel's sword.  
Blessed be God.*

*I offer thee  
every cloud that ever swept  
O'er the skies, and broke and wept  
In rain, and with the flowers slept.  
My king.*

*Every communicant praying  
every angel staying  
before thy throne to sing.  
We adore you.*

*I offer thee  
every flake of virgin snow,  
every spring of earth below  
every human joy and woe  
My love.*

*O Lord! And all thy glorious  
self o'er death victorious  
throned in heaven above.  
We glorify you.*

Love and peace

Martin