

COR Newsletter – 11 March 2009

Dear all,

Last Sunday morning

A good size congregation with a good smattering of new and old friends, a few visitors, two marriage couples and a prospective baptism family. In the readings we were spoilt for choice, with the foundational story of Abram/Abraham and Sarai/Sarah and Paul's use of that story in his argument for faith preceding law and Mark's account of Jesus telling his would be followers that they had to lose their life in order to gain it, and that suffering and death was an indispensable part of his mission - Phew!

and in the afternoon.....

Four youngsters are still keeping me on my toes trying to convey the Christian faith and church to them. One mum told me it was having a real effect and saying that was a real shot in the arm because you never quite know. There are also now **four adults** who have made it clear that they want to be confirmed, so if you did have a stirring - don't be afraid - there will be other adults with you.

Next Sunday

I will be in Sofia with our sister congregation celebrating with them at 9am. (Yes 9am!! - The RCs hold their stations of the cross service during Lent so we are even earlier than usual). In Bucharest there will be a service of **Morning Prayer at 10am with Sunday school.**

Tonight

There is a church council meeting at 7pm in church.

The electoral roll

is proceeding. There are two more Sundays to get your name down. The AGM is on the 29th March after the service. If you think you might want to join the church council ask for a nomination form from me.

Looking ahead.

to **5th April** - Passion Sunday or Palm Sunday if you prefer - at 6pm in the evening we will be having **an orchestra and choir** in the COR and they will be presenting **Matthew's passion** by Telleman. This is to be considered a part of our worship so come along if you can. These are professional musicians so it should be very good indeed. I will be unable to join you I'm afraid, (but Lillah Houghton, our church warden, will be on duty), as I will be celebrating in Sofia for the very last time on this weekend.

The thought for today.

One of the experiences that helped my old Christian faith to die to be replaced by a deeper, more realistic Christian faith was working in a children's AIDS hospice in Cernavoda some years ago. Looking into the eyes of a severely handicapped child, who cannot communicate at all, and who would very soon die of AIDS never reaching adulthood and never having a childhood is an experience that is etched into my soul. It changed me forever. I lost my faith and was in the wilderness for a while before a new, different and deeper faith replaced it. Shallow "feel

good" Christianity and empty platitudes would never take me hostage again. I have often tried to explain that experience to others but never in any satisfactory way - like most people I struggle to explain things that are almost beyond examination. But thumbing through one of my classics - "Against an infinite horizon" by Ronald Rolheiser - he comes close. He writes how it is not our successes, good experiences or what others admire us for that build up our souls. Most if not all genuine growth comes after first falling apart. Particularly apt for Lent I reproduce some of what Fr. Ronald says;

"To the contrary, our souls, precisely in that they have depth, strength, compassion, and hold interest for others have been shaped by something quite different: the fear that I will gain weight and end up looking like my mother, the shame I feel because my teeth aren't straight, the birthmark I cannot hide, the blemishes that set me apart, the fat around my waist and the hips that humble me, the fear that I am not smart enough, not interesting enough, that my background is not good enough, my phobias, my timidities, my plain and simple inadequacies. These, coupled with the nappies I have changed, the humiliations I endure in my work, in my marriage, and in my family that I am powerless to do anything about, the insults and taunts I received in the playground, my drunken stepfather, these are what give me depth of soul. It is not that these are, in and of themselves, good. It is just that when we listen to them we grow deep. They build up our souls. These inferiorities, these humiliations, are not things to be cured from, things to be solved, things to be ignored, things to be buried as private and past shames. They are to be listened to. They are entries into the depths of our souls.

Daniel Berrigan was once asked to give a talk on God. How do we listen to God? He surprised his audience. He gave no theological treatise; he simply described how he goes regularly and sits at the bedside of a young boy who is deaf, mute, paralysed, and unable to react in any way to anything that is around him. He just lies in bed, helpless, powerless, unable to say or do anything. Berrigan goes and sits by his bedside. Nothing is said, and seemingly, nothing is exchanged. But, says Berrigan, I sit by his helplessness and I know in his powerlessness God is speaking - and speaking in the only way that God can speak in this world. Inferiority, powerlessness, humiliation - forgers of depth, of soul, the voice of God."

The **prayer for today** was written by a teenager from Harare in Zimbabwe.

God, Help me to be human.

Help me to bring out the best in everyone around me.

You have created man, so that he is capable to consciously appreciate all the gifts you have given him.

Lord, help me to appreciate all you have given me.

Help me to be truly human.

Amen

Love and peace

Martin