

COR Newsletter – 08 April 2009

Dear all,

Last Sunday in Sofia

was also my **last** ever Eucharist in Sofia, so I was fairly emotional, but held it together long enough to make the end of the service. A great congregation celebrated western Palm Sunday (the Orthodox are one week behind us this year) in the lovely little chapel in Oborishte street.

Afterwards I was pleased to say that there was quite a discussion over the content of my sermon - initialising a serious and probing walk with God is what every priest hopes for and in Sofia this prayer has been answered in spades in a variety of people.

Note: The Hebrew word "Israel" translates literally as "Struggle with God"

After the service I was presented with a lovely Bulgarian Orthodox icon of Christ, a fountain pen for signing the registers in my new churches, and a small goblet from one of our Bulgarian members. Thank you everyone.

After the service it was made clear that this weekly email is now an integral part of their Christian journey and I was asked if I could I keep it going and I was also asked if in future my sermons also could be made available. This is of course flattering, and I will be looking at various options, including setting up a web log that can be accessed by anyone with a computer. This may be integrated with the setting up of a similar email communication in the UK. I have set Claire to work on this already - she needed something to do in her Easter break!

.....Ten minutes after writing that last sentence Claire had already set up a blogspot for me complete with pictures - too industrious by half that girl. The address is <http://revmartinjacques.blogspot.com> and Claire has already posted the first page!!

Take a look for me. I'm flying a kite on this one. If you think this is a good idea, let me know and I'll get to work on it, though probably not until I've settled back in Britain. Thank you to Sharon for letting me stay with her this last time, and to everyone who has given me accommodation over the last year, Jonathan and Tsvetta, Gino and Mira, Chris, and Steve and Fiona. It has been a privilege to minister to everyone there over the last three years. I allowed myself a couple of tears as I drove out of Sofia with the snow capped Vitosha mountain in my rear view mirror. When I got back to Bucharest I opened the card given to me on behalf of Paula, David and the children who had to be in Plovdiv this weekend and tears again welled up. I will miss you all very much.

A resurrection near you!

If you remember fondly Dr. John Barker's very popular Blog that used to detail life at the COR in Bucharest. Well it has resurrected!! Obviously now slightly different because John is now based in Skopje but just as interesting. John has just loaded some **photos** of the above service in **Sofia** sent to him by Jonathan Dunne (more of Jonathan in a second). The address is <http://aresurrectionnearyou.blogspot.com>

You might find this interesting....

One of the elders of the Sofia congregation, Jonathan Dunne, is an Oxford classics scholar, linguist, translator, author, poet and all round renaissance man (and a lovely man and a good friend). His last published work was a book called "the DNA of the

English language". If you think you might like an intriguing treatise on how your language developed, click on to his own weblog which is as follows;
<http://the-dna.blogspot.com>

Wednesday

There is a **church council meeting** at 7pm in church. Yes I know Liverpool are playing Chelsea in the Champions league tonight but don't worry, we'll be finished with plenty of time to spare.

Maundy Thursday

There is a Eucharist this Thursday evening starting at 7pm.

Good Friday

The church is open for prayer from 1pm with devotions starting at 2.45pm.

Easter Sunday

Holy Communion at 10am, with Sunday school.

Skopje calling, Skopje calling....

John is busy building a congregation in Skopje and will be holding an Easter eve service in the side chapel of the catholic cathedral. I am also particularly pleased to say that John is already in conversation with the Sofia congregation with a mind to taking a fuller role there as well (a match made in heaven I'd say) and is already pencilled in to take the May service. All being well, I hope John and Ela will also be able to join us in Bucharest for my last service on the 26th April - the old firm reunited. Let's hope so!!

Thought for the day

Why would anyone shed a tear at leaving a place, a job or a set of people? The answer is surely grief. In leaving the *people* especially it is like a series of mini bereavements - and when you are bereaved you grieve.

In and around the Sofia congregation, bereavement has stalked us in the ordinary comings and goings of the congregation of course but also in the bereavement suffered in the heartaches of broken personal relationships that I have been privy to, and in the death of members of the family of one of our number, Chris Bevin. It is to grief that I want to turn.

Let me begin by stating something that I used to say at every funeral I ever took. To feel grief, you must first have loved. Love and grief are connected. If you had not loved, you would not be grieving. To expose yourself to loving someone exposes you to the process of that love being hurt by the eventual leaving of that person or eventually the certainty of the death of the other person. And death, like taxes, is the one certainty we all share. As we affirmed on Ash Wednesday at the start of Lent - From dust you came and to dust you shall return. Grief is the natural corollary to love. Don't be ashamed to grieve unless you are ashamed to have loved.

Those looking for a biblical warrant - should one be needed - need only look to Jesus when he was told the news that his friend Lazarus had died. His reaction is recorded in the famously shortest verse of the Bible - "Jesus wept". Jesus also wept over the fate of Jerusalem and the Jewish people.

Grief is natural and if I recall, when I quoted Henri Nouwen a couple of weeks ago, he talked of the healing properties of those shed tears. I say these things so they

must be taken into account alongside the opinion that "they have gone to a better place". I truly believe that, but even knowing that can only go so far in mitigating the misery felt in knowing that never again, in this life, will you see their face, feel their touch, or hear them laugh and cry.

I used to go on to say that the Christian message is one in which those bonds of love can not be broken even by death. Because someone dies, you do not stop loving them. God, even more so, loves us now and his love too extends beyond this mortal existence. As I also believe in the survival of human personality in its fullest sense, I could also say with complete honesty that loved ones would be reunited after death. I am an unashamed universalist, so do not share some of my fellow priest's uncomfortableness in presiding at the funerals of unbelievers. *Perhaps the most touching and honest displays of real grief I have ever experienced was when I presided at the funeral of a young girl - a drug addict tearaway, petty thief and burglar who had committed suicide in Margate.*

One of the most important things I learned at the college of the resurrection, something that changed my life and beliefs forever from the ones that had been prevalent at my broadly evangelical church, and has been the motor that has driven my ministry ever since was told to me by my spiritual director - the renowned liturgist and author (and now superior of the community) Fr. George Guiver. He told me at one of our meetings;

"Salvation is not something just out of reach we have to strain to grasp after - it is the very ground on which we stand".

Think on that as we prepare to celebrate the resurrection this Easter Sunday. I was never the same again once I had internalised that message of that final and eternal victory of good over evil, of life over death.

The prayer for today is the prayer set for Easter Sunday taken from a book called "Lent and Easter Wisdom from Thomas Merton" and compiled by The Merton Institute for contemplative living.

*Reconcile today Lord Jesus,
all things and me to your Father in the power of the Holy Spirit
whom you have sent to renew us in freedom and joy
through the mystery of your resurrection from the dead.
In the words of St. Patrick, hear my Easter prayer:
"Christ, as a light, illumine and guide me.
Christ as a shield, overshadow and cover me.
Christ, be ever over me.
Christ be under me.
Christ be beside me, on left hand and right.
Christ, this day be within and without me.
Christ, the lowly and the meek.
Christ the all-powerful.
Be in the heart of each to whom I speak.
In the mouth of each who speaks to me,
in all who draw near to me, or hear me, or see me." Alleluia.*

Love and peace.

Martin