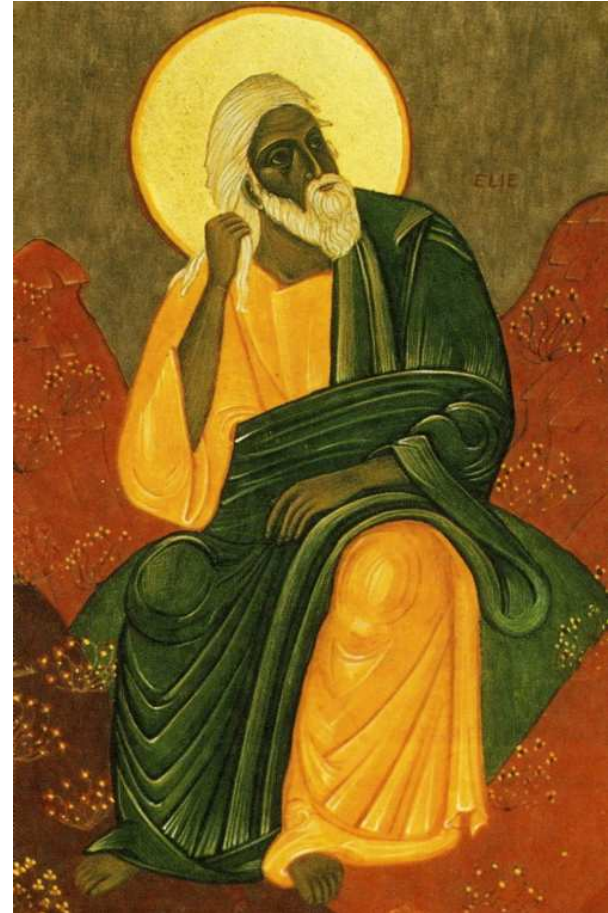


« Listen so that you may live ! »



Newsletter from Grandchamp 2008

'Ho, everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters;
Come, buy and eat ...
Come, buy wine and milk, Without money and without price ...
Incline your ear, and come to me
Listen, so that you may live ! '
Isaiah 55: 1-3

This generous invitation expresses the very heart of God, the free gift of his love. He knows the most secret aspirations of the human heart, our existential thirst, he knows our desire for happiness, for fullness of life.

'Listen so that you may live'. Our lives depend on Another who offers himself to us in his Word or in the silence; this Other is communicated in the beauty of creation, in events, in encounters too. The appeal to listen is heard throughout Scripture, from the 'Shema Israel', 'Hear O Israel', to the Book of Revelation passing through the revelation to the three disciples that Jesus took onto the mountain: 'This is my son the beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' (Matthew 17:5) The appeal is to listen to the One who says 'I am the light of the world', this world that today is still bruised by injustice, violence, conflict, where darkness so often seems to get the upper hand.

As Christmas comes, one particular song inspires us: 'Come Light, light of God, give light to creation, enlighten our hearts and remain with your world'. This light envelops us and gives insight through the meditation of the Word and contemplating a face, the face of Christ. Listening to him and contemplating him is one and the same thing. The whole of life for Jesus was listening to his Father, welcoming his Word. His joy, his only desire, his essential nourishment was to accomplish the will of the Father. It was from the Father that he received his identity as Son from moment to moment.

As we follow Jesus, do we not have to be born and reborn every day, of the Word, and to become those children of light that the 'whole creation has been groaning in labour pains' to see revealed? (Romans 8:19,22) The work of the Word of God is to do just that, sown in a quietened heart that is open to a Presence; a listening heart like that of Mary the mother of Jesus. By an unconditional welcome, Mary allowed the Word to become flesh of her flesh, to become fruitful: a new life developed and grew in her womb, the life of Christ that she would give to the world.

God is not asking us for any extraordinary feats: just to be there, to offer what we are, with our gifts and our fragility, our light and dark sides, to consent to the suffering that inevitably arises from time to time in life. Will we dare welcome our own poverty and open it to the breath of the Holy Spirit, laying ourselves open to the creative power of the Word day in day out? It is up to us to keep the word, to ponder it in our hearts – sometimes it will be just the name of Jesus repeated tirelessly – and thus let it accomplish its work, and bear its fruit. It will go down into the depths of our being, into our flesh, into those places of pain that await to be visited in order to open up to Life. Our only task is to turn back constantly towards the light. Gradually this life that comes from Another grows. It is the life of Christ in us.

Listening ... a fundamental reality, and yet so difficult in our modern societies that are in a period of extreme and rapid change, being upturned in so many ways, and where we are assaulted by noise and drowned in words. The Churches themselves are living through difficult times, having to face new challenges, and unable to escape these continual pressures. Not surprising then because of all this, that there are many listening places springing up today; that a need for such places of spiritual refreshment is getting stronger, places 'where the silence of people calls down the creative power of the Word of God. It is a matter of life and death' wrote Mother Geneviève long ago in 1938.

Yes the Word accomplishes that which it says. All through life, it enables us to be born to ourselves, to what we already are deep down, people of communion, open to others, in the image of Christ. That is the gift of God, his delight and joy! 'Listen to him!' he says to us, so that we ourselves can learn from Christ how to listen, how to receive from him the word that gives peace and renewed trust to others, where the silence becomes a presence. Whether they want to share a discovery, a happy experience, or to confide in you with doubts, questions or a tough period of solitude, simply listening to someone can open up a way. We know this from experience and without our realising it, it often prepares a new birth from within, and helps to liberate Life.

Listening, is 'offering hospitality'
To Another, to every other.

Sister Pierrette

On the first page the picture shows Elijah, an icon painted by sr Albertine

Listening, a theme that brings us back to the very beginning of the Community. Didn't everything start while listening and germinating in the silence of retreat where the Word of God was allowed to resonate and progress deep down in the heart to bear fruit? When recollecting these early stages, **Rosette Genton**, who went to be with the Lord last June, used to say quite often: 'listening, getting rooted in the Word through prayer in order to 'become' word, that's the main thing'. Marthe Westphal evokes the person who has been so close to Mère Geneviève and also promoted the Servant of Unity (S.U.):

« In speaking of Rosette, I must speak of how she listened, listened in a way that lead her into obedience, the obedience of a life totally consecrated to God, "So that God may be all in all" (1Cor 15, 28).

This listening that characterised Rosette was deep listening of the heart. The sort of listening that, as with the Desert Fathers, goes beyond appearances and can hear the intimate truth within each person and each word. This is the listening that engendered the Servant of Unity in Rosette, that which she became and enabled other women to become. Some called her their 'spiritual mother', others more a 'mid wife', who helped and was present at their birth into life as a Servant of Unity. Be that as it may, I would say that Rosette listened to the Word, to the Church, to the world and to all who came to her.

Her listening to the Word was listening in love, always alert for the revealing of the truth of this Word hidden in the Scriptures.

Rosette listened to Christ, in solitude and in the secret place of her heart; she listened in the desert of daily life where she met and deepened her friendship with the Desert Fathers and the early Fathers of the undivided Church. In this way Rosette knew how to listen to the world, to its heart beat, to its hopes and explorations, to its culture. As a sociologist Rosette analysed what happened and was never indifferent; this meant that she expressed real curiosity about the places where each of us lived our daily lives, so that daily life became nothing less than life in God.

Discretion was another characteristic of Rosette. But how can we speak about someone's discretion – when she was just that... discretion? I will say only that her discretion was also discernment. One day Rosette set out with several other women connected with Grandchamp, like a companion of Abraham, to respond to a call to bring to life a movement of women invited to live a contemplative life not in a community, but in the every day world. This life was one of ardent but hidden prayer "that they may be one" as Christ willed – the life of the Servants of Unity. Mother Genevieve, who accompanied these initial steps, had long been mindful of the question of a more hidden vocation for women living alone, whether single or widowed. They went forward using as their rule what we call the 'Texte de Base', written by Brother Roger of Taizé, who had first written this with men in mind, called to a hidden monastic life.

And now, here we are, we who have inherited this vocation, gathered by Christ, in the unity of the Spirit, scattered through several countries, living as far as we can in the prayerfulness of listening

and discretion, guided by the 'route map' which Rosette left us:

'Becoming a Servant of Unity is to enter into God's design: God created the world in all its beauty, complexity and variety in order to form a symphony of peace and unity in diversity through his Son (John 1).

To be a Servant of Unity is to participate in the victorious combat of Jesus Christ, who lived, died and resurrected that God's will be done; it is a way of witnessing to Christ within the communion of the Church.

But the Church is forever falling prey to internal conflicts; how can the Church be leaven of peace when it is scarcely an example itself of what it preaches, when even individual Christians are divided, each within his or her self?

A Servant of Unity is called to become aware of her own weakness and of her judging attitudes, in order to receive mercy and to live within the Church and in the world, seeking the unity given by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Through her commitments to obedience, poverty and celibacy a Servant of Unity makes herself humbly available, there where she finds herself, in order to live as a sign that all love has its source, its abiding strength and its final end in God' (1Cor 15, 26-28). »

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As Days Go By...

Our **Council** this summer had that very theme of listening. In the retreat, brother François shared with us his experience of a whole life of listening; that was also the testimony left by Rosette Genton who was a friend and even more a sister to us. With deep emotion and gratitude

we were able to give thanks together for her dedicated life and share all that we had received from her through her teaching, her listening, her support and the way she discreetly accompanied the Community from when it began.

The Council is a time of listening for God's call to the Community today. We had great joy from celebrating sr Lauranne's profession and also from taking time to look back on sr Jakoba's call to go to the Holy Land fifty years ago. We realised how significant our presence is in that place still today, opening us all to the Jewish roots of our faith and being equally present to each of the two peoples that dwell in that land. Three sisters went back to **Ste Elisabeth** in September: sr Maatje, sr Hiltje with sr Pascale for a time then sr Vreni will take her place.

Listening together and listening to each other, our community meetings allow us to share the joys and concerns that come up in the various places where we live or in the Church contexts where we find ourselves: in **Algiers**, where sr Renée and sr Anne-Geneviève are deeply involved, the Protestant Church is going through some big difficulties and tension. The Catholic Church welcomes a new Archbishop, Mgr Khabeb Bader, from Jordan. He succeeds Mgr Teissier, who had guided the Christians in Algeria for a long period and helped them to become truly a Church of dialogue and meeting. At **Woudsend** (in the Netherlands) the parish which for many years has brought together reformed and re-reformed Christians, has now had the courage to completely restore the interior of the Chapel. Sr Christianne writes: *'all we need to do now is to reinvent ourselves, each day, in order to mirror out in the village the fact that the challenge we had to face*

financially in the restoration work, also expresses a boldness in our Christian faith. This boldness is the desire to trust others in the whole of life and in God.'

On the Path of Reconciliation.

**Vigils for Reconciliation:* The Taizé meeting in Geneva inspired a new impetus and gave new hope to the parishes that had welcomed the young people and to many others. Brother Alois' call for Christians of all denominations to pray together has become a reality here in Neuchâtel with a monthly prayer service in the Notre Dame Basilica. There is both urgency and grace in being able to turn together to God in praise, in a simple kind of prayer, in a silence of listening and expectation borne along by Christ's prayer 'that all may be one.' These significant prayer times prolong our ecumenical meetings and celebrations of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity for which we were much in demand this year. Sr Pierrette addressed the ecumenical service in Neuchâtel.

**Witnesses of Reconciliation:* Many of our friends went to be in God's light in the course of this year.

~ Lukas Vischer left us: he worked in the World Council of Churches (Faith and Constitution) for many years and was fully involved in the environmental cause. He was a pioneer in 'the preservation of the planet' campaign.

~ Mgr Emilianos Timiadis and Don Hernando who opened up new horizons by starting the International Interdenominational Meetings for religious sisters and brothers (now called the EIIR). The first meeting was held in Grandchamp in 1970.

~ Dom Philibert, former Abbot of the Monastery of Le Bec was also passionate about unity and one who witnessed the longstanding relationship between Grandchamp and le Bec Hellouin.

**Meetings:* Those we attend regularly are precious sharing times: Sr Vreni went to the Ephrem meeting in Tubet (at the Little Sisters of Jesus'). Since 1967 some sisters have been getting together to listen for the challenges and appeals addressed to their contemplatives communities by women who are not cloistered but who are consecrated and committed in the Church. Sr Anneke went to the Kaïre meeting in Erfurt: sisters and deaconesses, women who are consecrated and involved in the Church come together every two years in different European countries. This is another Church and Community set-up for journeying together towards unity.

Various **Missions and journeys** have happened this year:

~ sr Pierrette gave a little retreat for the Ecumenical Prayer Fraternity of Romainmôtier; sr Lucie-Martine led another at Lamastre, in the Ardèche region of France, and sr Minke took another in Imshausen. Sr Minke also gave testimony in the 20th anniversary celebration of the El Roi community in Bâle with the title: 'Community life as an opening to ecumenism', and she develops this theme much more in her book: 'Vers une gratuité féconde'. We are waiting for this book to come out in the French and Dutch languages soon.

~ Another testimony was that of sr Veronika: 'Community Prayer, a way to Peace'. That was to welcome the 'Caravan of women for peace' when it came to Neuchâtel.

~ sr Pascale participated in the meeting of the Department for Community Research at the Abbey of Haute Combe which had the theme: 'Ecumenism: a gift and a task.'

~ The contribution of sr Thérèse in a meeting of the Diakonische Gemeinschaft in Dresden was: 'Silence and Community Life'.

~ sr Janny stayed a while with the Trappist sisters in Berkel-Enschot (Netherlands) with a stop in Brussels for a meeting with the Fraternity of the Suffering Servant.

~ sr Minke took part in the 'journey of peace' to Israel/ Palestine, organised by Father Shoufani, with Magda Lafon and a small group of Jews, Muslims and Christians.

~ For their end of Noviciate journey, sr Miriam and sr Mariane together with sr Pierrette and sr Regina went to the Cévennes region of France. There they discovered the Museum of the Desert and had meetings with brother Daniel Bourguet in the Abeillières; and with the Cistercian sisters at Cabanoule.

~ Several sisters made long journeys to see their families: sr Siong with her twin sister Twie went to Indonesia; sr Minke went to Canada; and sr Eve-Evelyne went to the Congo.

... Visitors too

The visit of the brothers from Taizé on the day after the meeting in Geneva will stay engraved in our hearts: the joy of our midday prayer, of the meal shared and the warm exchange. Also we had the visit of three Iraqi brothers, Wissam, Yassir and Rahid – that were friends of Marie-Laure - with a moving time of sharing about their search for monastic life in that land of Iraq so torn apart; another Iraqi visit followed from brother Rami, a dominican. Sr Marie-Louise and sr Marthe, deaconesses from Rubenga (Rwanda) came from Bossey with sr Sisina, a dominican missionary in Peru, to tell us about their experiences at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey. Not long after that, we had the joy of welcoming sr Anke their Superior. We had several Little Sisters of Jesus (Maria-Lydia, Danièle-Noële, Sisirani, Bushra, Maria-Béatrix, Anna Serena) to stay, also sr Suzanne of the sisters of Notre-Dame of

Montreal who gifted us with a taste of a fellowship lived in everyday life. We had two lightning visits that were very joyful: Revd Simon Kossi Doussou, the President of the Methodist Church in Benin came accompanied by Revd Célestin Kiki, who had been chosen to be the new General Secretary of the CEVAA just the day before, and the Revd Chantal Gohungo. We also welcomed the Revd. Lala Rasendrasasina, the president of the FJKM, the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar. Father Franz Jalics s.j. also called on us, and he was the initiator of the 'Contemplative Exercises' that Karin Seethaler and Sr Michèle have been giving in Grandchamp and in Sonnenhof.

The Hospitality we offer is always inviting us to enlarge the space of our tent, both in Grandchamp and in Sonnenhof where we have been many times overwhelmed by the number of requests! And our horizon is widened... each year we are amazed to discover so many new faces and diverse groups all with the same thirst and on the same quest for the essential. Just to illustrate this diversity we can note some of the groups we welcomed:

The professors from the Graduate School of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey; the fraternity of the Good Samaritan for their retreat 'Love and Forgiveness'; students in Theology from the Adventist Church; Foyers d'Unité' of Morges; members of the 'Fraternité des Veilleurs'; a mixed group of ministers (men and women) from the North of Germany accompanied by their Bishop, Bärbel Wartenberg-Potter, and Dr Jörn Halbe – after the retreats in Ratzeburg, they had a great wish to discover Grandchamp; the future deacons and ministers of the EEREV (Eglise Evangélique Réformée du canton de Vaud)

came as part of their preparation for ordination; the mixed work-group of the Roman Catholic Church and of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, with Dr John Gibaut, the new chairman of 'Faith and Constitution'. We turned a page in **the Sonnenhof** this year: after a long and fruitful ministry faithfully lived out Professeur Erich Bochinger gave his last retreat in the summer; both the sisters and the guests expressed their deep gratitude to him.

In our **spiritual family**: the Third Order of Unity have this year taken as their theme: 'As long as the earth endures...' from Genesis 8/22. We rejoiced in the commitments taken by Françoise Delitroz, who is doing part of her practical diaconal training with us; also of Françoise Mouron at Grandchamp, of Karin Schick in Sonnenhof. Two of the Servants of Unity also made their commitment. Of course, the recent death of Rosette left its mark on their Session on the theme of 'I stand at the door and knock..'

Since the summer, many folk have, like us, enjoyed **the new entrance to the Chapel in the Arche**. It is bigger, with a fine oak staircase, a lift and a beautiful vestry! We want here to thank our architect, M. Kohler, also, all the project managers and workmen: thank you very much indeed!

Listening as we travel along together, saying yes to life as it comes, even if we are rushed off our feet; daring to trust, offering our five loaves and our two little fishes and hearing Him say: 'the little you give is sufficient'. We all have the experience day after day of God's providing all we need through your gestures of friendship, your support, your generous help in all kinds of ways... We are deeply grateful for that. We want to

thank you all most warmly: Bernard, Sister Ursula now back in Berlin, all our volunteers, Marie-Hélène who gave us energy and cheerfulness through her singing, to you all who have been angels for us, we give you warmest thanks.

And how can we not also remember those who have left us this year: Béatrice Dessoulavy, our former neighbour; Marie Drouby, our Orthodox Sister and friend from Lebanon; Marga Frey, Madeleine Bernath and Isabelle Reichard of the TOU...

As Christmas approaches and in the Communion of the One who ever invites us to be born and to be born again we wish you a Nativity celebration full of light and peace!

Your Sisters in Grandchamp.

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On the Website www.grandchamp.org
you will find our programme for 2009,
as well as our reading lists