

Called to be praise



NEWSLETTER FROM GRANDCHAMP 2018

Praising Together

“ ‘Let the sound of his praise be heard’, sings Psalm 66, expressing what is deep and essential in our human vocation. Daily liturgical prayer is part of all creation’s praise to the Creator and it allows us to enter into a never-ending praise that was there before us in time and space, and which continues after us. It is ‘set in the communion of saints’ writes Brother Roger in his Rule. It joins the great liturgy celebrated in heaven (Rev 7: 9-12), the praise of Christ before his Father, his intercession for the whole of humanity. Daily liturgical prayer is the prayer of the Holy Spirit, which comes to help us in our weakness and teaches us to pray in truth. It prepares our hearts to receive the Word of God and roots us in adoration of the One God, three times Holy, Father, Son and Holy Spirit...

Our common praise thus turns us towards the Source to receive the gift of community day by day.” (Introduction to ‘Louange des Jours à Grandchamp’, p 8.) And on Sundays we sing:

*“You who call us to be praise in the midst of the earth, glory to you!
We sing your praise in the midst of the world and of the nations,
in the midst of creation and of all living creatures;
in the midst of suffering and tears,
in the midst of promise and accomplishment;
in the midst of conflicts and misunderstandings,
in the midst of encounters and reconciliations;
in the midst of dissensions and divisions;
in the midst of life and death, of the birth of a new heaven and a new earth.”*

This is the theme that accompanies us this year.

You who call us... Each morning we receive anew this call to praise God together. We are created for praise and to celebrate our Creator. We are called to express our joy at being alive, and to witness to God’s action in our personal and collective stories. ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all His benefits.’ (Psalm 103)

God wants us to be happy! That is our identity as children of God.

... to be praise... That is being fully aware that we are creatures in relation to the Creator and to other created beings. This totally commits us, but, on the other hand, we remain totally free. *To be...* This implies being active, living this praise in all that happens, as the litany just quoted sings. We are made to become praise ourselves: our whole life is directed towards this ‘becoming’.

And praise, like the melody of a violinist, if it is performed to rise up to God, also touches those around us. Praise becomes alive with other people in inter-dependence. It connects us in the vertical as well as the horizontal; it is the hyphen *between* earth and heaven.

... in the midst of... There is a struggle in praise because it must include everything: the beautiful and the not so beautiful. It means bringing everything with us. Brother Richard said to us in a retreat: “In the psalms the verbs to praise, to give thanks, to bless are often in future tense. Praise is not automatic. There is much complaining and

supplication in the psalms. Praise is not a tranquil river, but is often interrupted and torn apart by difficult and testing times. Jonah is also a good example. Thrown into the sea and, even worse, swallowed by the sea monster, what does he do? In this double no-exit situation, he remembers God and sings God's praises: 'Salvation belongs to the Lord' (Jonah 2:9). 'If Jonah had not been one of those who praised, he would have remained in the belly of the fish until the day of resurrection.' (Quran, Surah 37:143-144) Those who praise become fully alive."

This is the paschal dimension of praise; it makes us pass from death to life. And the one who is saved, the one who is alive, draws others into praise.

Eloi Leclerc lived praise in the crucible of his experience as a young brother on one of the many death trains in the Second World War. Whilst one of his brothers was dying in a corner of the wagon, all began singing St Francis' hymn to creation:

... Be praised my Lord, with all the creatures, especially master brother Sun...

Be praised my Lord for sister moon and the stars...

Be praised my Lord for those who forgive for love of you; who bear hardships and illness:

Blessed are they if they keep peace...

(Louange des Jours, p 192.)

This call to praise is thus also a way of resisting evil. To offer praise, to call on his Name in places of brokenness and death and even in death itself, keeps us human in the midst of dehumanizing situations. We often allow ourselves to be carried along by the current of the morbid atmosphere around us, and by doing so we risk living every trial as meaningless and become stuck. To make of it a way towards life implies a certain poverty, a readiness to listen and to receive, like the shepherds and Zechariah and Mary. From this place springs up a song of deliverance!

Etty Hillesum, is also a powerful example of praise lived deeply in the 'in-spite-of' "I find life beautiful and I feel free. In me the sky stretches as vast as the firmament. I believe in God and I believe in humankind... I am a happy woman and I sing the praises of this life, yes you read it aright, in the year of grace 1942, the Nth year of the war."

Praise truly includes everything: suffering, division, death, reconciliation, life, to open up all of it to the Source that gives way to joy, simplicity and mercy.

Sister Anne-Emmanuelle

Hallelujah

Hallelujahs resound throughout the First Testament, especially in the psalms. So why not ask someone steeped in the Torah to teach us what the Jewish tradition says? We asked Professor Armand Abécassis who has been coming regularly to the community for more than 30 years, helping so many of us to discover the riches of reading the Midrash:

“The verb ‘to praise’ in Hebrew is *Hallel* and it is found in the *Halelouyah* of the psalms. It can be divided into two parts: *Halelou* (praise), and *Yah* (God). But what does this praise consist of? What exactly does it mean to praise God? The verb ‘to praise’ comes from the Latin *laudare*, which means to commend highly, to speak of the merits of someone, to congratulate them. But clearly, we cannot speak of the praise of God in this way! What sense could there be in congratulating God, in commending his merits or speaking highly of him? So what exactly does the Hebrew verb *Hallel* want to communicate about praise in relation to God? It is built on the determinative *Hal* that also exists in Arabic and in Spanish as *Al*. The term *Hallel* consists of the double article *Hal* that gives it its true meaning and translates the authentic relationship of joy that the worshipper feels before God. Singing the *Hallel* is thus to name the divine attributes, saying exactly how God appears to us, no more and no less. The 150 psalms, with all the Hallelujahs they contain, are songs, prayers, proclamations and appeals to God as Creator and Liberator. Praise of God is nothing less than proclaiming with joy what he reveals of Himself to us. Jews and Christians must unite in singing the *Hallel* of God, that is, to witness of our faithfulness to what is the essential character of the One we all call God: He is Creator and He is Liberator.

Creation signifies the separation between Nature and God. Nothing in the world can be proclaimed ‘divine’, neither its order nor its exceptional beauty. That means that we cannot take the order and beauty of nature as a model for individual or collective human conduct. This is the principle that allowed the Hebrews to be distinguished from, and opposed to, paganism. That is what we must announce and sing out in the world today – a world increasingly submitted to the order of nature through economic, mechanical, digital and military powers. We have to bear joyful witness by proclaiming the distinctiveness of the spiritual principles that give meaning to human existence; as opposed to the laws that maintain order and beauty in nature. Creation means that we have one foot in this world and one in another moral and spiritual world; we exist in two worlds at the same time, one which is and one which must be. Our liberty is therefore assured and our responsibility too. Thanks to His Word and His Law we are not submitted to nature but we commit ourselves to live in it according to his moral and spiritual project that transcends nature.

That is the meaning of the *Hallel* and of the *Halelouyah*; Jews and Christians singing together in today’s world that the God we serve is the one who wills the liberation of people because He is the Creator of the world. In His image we must create our world by means of the Word he has entrusted to us.”

Armand Abécassis

With him, and also for him, we can say ‘hallelujah’ for these words that open our hearts to the Word, hearts that remain open even though he gave his last teaching last May.

In the attention we give to Ecumenism, the *Oikumene* (the whole inhabited earth), we of course include inter-religious dialogue. In the community's early years one sister set out for Israel and another for Algeria, and others followed, so relationships grew, here, there... After hearing Armand Abécassis, our friend Allaoui speaks here for Islam. Allaoui is a Sufi on the same path as Sheik Bentounes who caused the UN to vote to set up the international day of 'Living Together in Peace'. We observed this day with times of prayer in the chapel. Earlier Allaoui had led a retreat at Grandchamp for several Sufis and a sister from the Monastery at Mar Moussa. At certain times sisters who wished to could join their prayer:

"In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful"

"Heavenly wisdom says: *"if you wanted to quantify the blessings of God, you could not do so."*

It says also: *"Secure God's blessings by praise."*

One morning when I had woken up in a somewhat rebellious mood towards the hazards of life on earth, I received a message that said: "A blind, disabled man, undergoing terrible illness, praised the Lord with energy, enthusiasm and love. A passerby stopped, captivated by such a situation and said to him; *"Salam my friend, I don't understand why, in your state of deep suffering, you are praising the Lord with such love and fervour?"* He replied: *"But how can I not to praise the Lord? He has left me my tongue to praise him. How can one not praise him?"*

Can we really quantify God's blessings? I don't think so. We will always remain in his debt. So let us ask the Almighty, the Divine Presence to teach us how to praise Him so that all hidden blessings are revealed to us and allow us to

understand things as people of the heart, and say: *"When God loves a servant he rekindles that person's inner light, a light which allows one to perceive the origins, the evolution and the very end of every single thing."* By this, the heart is calm in the face of divine decrees and can say with conviction: *El hamadoulillah wa choukroulillah* 'Praise to you Lord and thanks be to you Lord for all that you have decreed for us, so that we realise why you created us'.

We say quite rightly: 'Lord, I praise you with a praise that lasts and endures beyond all that is perishable.'"

Allaoui Abdellaoui

Through this praise we are led to a deep peace: Shalom, Salam upon all people!

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Praise in Daily Life

Daily life, whatever it involves, is the place of our praise, even at the heart of what upsets us, when time seems to accelerate, or amid inevitable conflicts and our own fragility. This daily round, which is not always ordinary, has been marked especially by:

-Important moments in the Community: Our meeting at the beginning of the year and the Council in the summer brought us all together around a sharing on the Eucharist with Marc Donzé and an approach to Saint Paul with Sophie Reymond. We also took part in a retreat with brother Richard of Taizé and a Bible study day with Sister Christianne and Maria de Groot - an opportunity for us to sample what they offer in the Netherlands! The professions of our sisters Dana and Martina Anna remain in our hearts as a shared time of grace and praise. The presence of Brother François and his message touched us deeply. We had the impression that he was leaving us his spiritual testament...

His death on October 18th during evening prayer at Taizé overwhelmed us. We have lost a brother who gave us so much in his teachings, retreats and in his own person for nearly 60 years!

- Beloved persons who have left us: our sisters Danièle and Paule. We give thanks for their lives as for the lives of our long-standing friends: Théo Schneider, Claude Rollier, Michel de Montmollin, Jacqueline Calame as well as Jean-Samuel Grand...

- Ecumenical events:

* The European Taizé Meeting in Basel which of course especially mobilised the Sonnenhof sisters and the parishes of Gelterkinden. Many new contacts were made through welcoming young people and praying with them for peace on New Year's Eve.

* A celebration followed by a conversation at the Arche with the three authors of the book 'Pour que plus rien ne nous sépare, trois voix pour l'unité'; (*'So that nothing more separates us, three voices for unity'*) by Shafique Keshavjee a Protestant, Claude Ducarroz a Catholic and Noël Ruffieux, an Orthodox.

* A moving meeting with Monseigneur Samir Nassar, Archbishop of Damascus. The Catholic Church had invited him and asked us to provide this welcome at Grandchamp with representatives from different churches in the Canton. The prayer of Vespers according to the Maronite rite was followed by a round table on 'Death and life of Eastern Christians'.

* The Papal visit to Geneva on the 70th anniversary of the World Council of Churches! Two sisters were able to be there.

* The Swiss day of the General Assembly of the Communion of Protestant

Churches in Europe (CEPE) in Basel. During the worship celebration in the morning the leaders of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches signed an agreement to be in dialogue at an institutional level. Four of our sisters, with others taking part, led vespers according to evening prayer in 'Louange des Jours à Grandchamp'!

* The meeting of consecrated men and women and members of Christian movements in Baar (Switzerland) in presence of the Cardinal Joao Braz de Aviz from the congregation for religious life. Sister Anne-Emmanuelle with Sister Siong gave a presentation about our community.

* A monastic forum for women in Spain where Sister Regina and Sister Svenja took part.

* An anniversary: For ten years Christians of different denominations in the Canton have been meeting for common prayer with Taizé chants. It was marked by an afternoon of celebration with several workshops, sharing groups and testimonies.

* Other meetings were also opportunities to create bonds and to praise God together, like the meeting of the Christian French-speaking Forum in Lyon; 'Together on the journey' (*Ensemble en chemin*) a subgroup of the movement called 'Together for Europe' (*Ensemble pour l'Europe*) at Don Camillo, and the meeting of the network of young religious in Fribourg...

Sharing Praise in the Holy Land

This is what Sister Siong and Sister Lucie-Martine experienced for two months with the Carmelite sisters of Saint Joseph in Isfyia, a Druze region of Israel. A beautiful and enriching experience of community and ecumenism.

The two months also gave them the opportunity for many encounters in that country, and our sisters had the joy of living Holy Week in Jerusalem.

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Praising in different ways

Two young women from Madagascar, close friends of the Community and valued volunteers when their studies permit, now share with us how they experience praise:

“God is a God of love, the source of joy, peace and grace. God is the author of all creation - in the world and the universe. In our Christian life, this reality of God is a call to praise, expressed in song, music, dance and prayer. Praise is a time of gratitude and rejoicing that strengthens our relationship with God. Praise is an element of our Christian life that keeps our faith alive, stimulating our joy in Christ beyond the suffering and difficulties of the world. In this testimony we are going to share what we have experienced of praise in two different settings that have marked us deeply. The first place is Madagascar, a wonderful island with its nature and its biodiversity, but a country that struggles so hard for justice for all, against poverty, and for the safeguard of creation. The second place is the Sisters’ Community at Grandchamp in Switzerland, where we have often spent time as volunteers.

In Madagascar, most of the population is Christian, and every Sunday at worship time the churches are packed with thousands of people coming to praise God. This attachment to God witnesses to their faith in his living, life-giving Word, in the face of poverty and all the difficulties of life, but also to the grace of God. In the assembly of young people in our parish that gathers every Sunday afternoon, praise is expressed

freely. First by a moment of free prayer where each one praises God silently from where they’re sitting, then by the reading of Psalms followed by songs, often with dances and shouts of joy. Praise calls out all these responses of our body and of our heart. Saying a prayer, singing, lifting our hands, following the movements and steps of a dance are all expressions of our praise to God. And this freedom of expression give us inner freedom and joy at all times, even in the difficult moments of life that we find hard to understand, in joy and in sorrow. Praise is also life and the sheer enjoyment of life that links us to each other and to God.

In the Community of Grandchamp we have experienced this praise differently and deeply. There, praise is expressed by silence before God, by a sung psalm and by sharing with other volunteers from different parts of the world. The silence during times of prayer or of work gives space for the Spirit which is in us to express, beyond words, a prayer or a song of praise to God. Singing psalms makes the praise more lively and brings us into communion with each other. The common praise has been for us the first fruits of praise in heaven - whatever country we come from. Living in praise means giving the first place to God and recognising God as the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent Lord. So God’s call to us to be praise in the midst of the earth can be lived personally or in communion, in all simplicity with body, soul and spirit.”

Santatra and Harena Rajaonarivelo

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Praise shared with many people near and far...

- With our friends of the Third Order of Unity in Benin who have recently welcomed two new members, Isaac Assogba and Nathanaël Fagla

-With the members of our spiritual family

-With all the people that we welcome for a time or silence or retreat

-With the increasing number of those who not only support us in a practical, voluntary way, but who seek stronger links with the community. We are trying to listen to this research that involves a lot of people. With the volunteers who live in our region we have already organised two days to

meet, and we really enjoyed those times of sharing and exchange.

Praise in the midst of the birth of a new heaven and earth

It is as we turn towards the fulfilment and hope of a world of peace and happiness for all, that we express our great gratitude to you for all your signs of support and friendship, and for your prayer. We send you our very best wishes for a blessed New Year and Christmas season!

The sisters in Grandchamp



Grandchamp 4, CH - 2015 Areuse

www.grandchamp.org: program for 2019 and list of readings

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