

A refreshing Breeze

NEWSLETTER FROM GRANDCHAMP 2010



« *It's too late to be pessimistic* »

These words come like a refrain in the last scenes of the film 'Home'. The film tells the story of our wonder-filled earth, describing the threats that now menace the planet, demonstrating the disastrous consequences of the way we have exploited the earth, then revealing initiatives that show a more responsible and respectful attitude towards creation.

« *It's too late to be pessimistic* » We could widen this statement in reference to our world in general, with the present upheavals and ever quicker changes. We think of the Church, which in our part of the world is going through difficult times, and must face the pain of being called into question with shrinking parishes and the lack of vocations as the church is pushed to the fringes of society.

The reality is indeed there before our eyes. We do not want to deny it, or to play down the gravity of the situation. However, we do need **to change the way to look** at things, to keep us from being trapped in a pessimistic view concerning both the present and the future, not allowing to stop at the shadows, or at what has ceased to be, or looks like a dead end. We must direct our gaze towards signs of hope that are there too. There are people who bring a breath of fresh air in so many different ways with economic, ecological and church-related initiatives - they don't always make a lot of noise about it, but they do open up new paths.

« *It is too late to be pessimistic* » Yes, something is dying, but something else is in the process of being born. Will we let ourselves be drawn to a faith viewpoint, not a naïve one, but one that seeks to discover what is at the very heart of existence to the signs of something growing, something new being born ? « *I am about to do a new thing ; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it ?*»
(Isaiah 43:19)

The prophets were already announcing another future - a new creation requiring an inner transformation in a new and decisive down pouring of the Holy Spirit. They glimpsed a new world of justice and peace that would be inaugurated with the coming of an envoy, the Lord's Anointed One : for us Jesus the Christ. The clearest sign of this newness that bursts into history and overturns the course of events is Easter - the resurrection of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell in us.

« *It is too late to be pessimistic* » Sometimes it needs a lot of courage to choose to trust and, in our night, to turn again and again towards the Light, the Light of Life

that is stronger than death, the Light of a love that never dies. In our today's situation, here and not somewhere else, God is speaking to us ; Christ, the Risen One at our side, and the Spirit ploughs our earth, an inexhaustible source of new life.

Do we know how to read our lives well enough in this light ? Here is an invitation to change the way we see things, to deepen and to grow in perception of the basic unity of all that is created, and to open ourselves to the reality of our interdependence with all that exists, all that lives. Thus, we humbly receive our rightful place amidst all creatures. For the covenant of love that God made with humankind extends to the whole creation.

Until the very day, the whole creation « *waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God* » (Romans 8:19). And already everywhere under heaven, witnesses to a reconciled humanity, men and women are seeking to be peacemakers, living the non-violence of the Gospel and respecting the infinite dignity of human life and of all life on earth.

It is like a birth process ; new times are being prepared within us. In the slow and patient transfiguration of our lives, we awaken in our true depth, as sons and daughters of God in the image of the Son. The newness of God comes into the world through our transformed hearts.

Jesus, 'gentle and humble of heart,' has opened the way for us. He is the beloved Son, the fullness of human life that God sees in him and awaits in us, too. God never ceases to hope and to invite us to walk in the Son's footsteps. « *Blessed are the poor in heart, ...those that mourn, ...those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, blessed are the merciful* ». As he proclaimed the Beatitudes, Jesus unveiled the secret in his life. All in him is a gift. Moment by moment, he receives himself from the Father's hand in his entire being as Son, in all his words and gestures. In following him, we open ourselves to the strength and gentleness of the Holy Spirit who wants to conform our lives to his.

The Gospel calls us to be witnesses to a world that is to come. The Beatitudes speak of a new inspiration, that of the kingdom already secretly present in our midst. Christ our hope has risen. He precedes us in the Light of Easter and calls us on.

*Happy are the meek, the humble ones,
for they will inherit the earth.*

Sister Pierrette

A profound encounter with a friend of our sisters in Algeria, a course on 'fasting and prayer', maintaining our buildings, reflecting on a new way of working together...these little slices of our daily life were the occasion of rich moments of sharing. We are offering you an echo of them through the eyes of different people.

Lallia's testimony is especially moving. She gave it the night before she had a cerebral haemorrhage that caused her death a few days later. She was Algerian and a Muslim, a close and long-standing friend of our sisters in Algiers and of all the community. She spent some weeks with us this summer. Her stay, which was during our Council, happened to be during the month of Ramadan and she lived it intensely. She was happy to pray with us, and several sisters had the joy of joining her in the evening when she broke her fast.

* * *

Lallia

At our annual Meeting, we had asked Lallia to write a few lines for our newsletter. As she could not see very well, we asked her questions and we wrote down these few lines at her dictation on the afternoon of 26th August.

« You will benefit from knowing
the different forms of religion.
Each one contains something
to nourish your own faith. »
Tierno Bokar (1875-1939)

I arrived for the first time in Grandchamp in 1966 with a sister from the Algiers Fraternity. What struck me most when I arrived in Grandchamp was the signpost that said 'No through road' and that contradicted everything that I knew of the Community's outgoing attitude. It was the first time I had been welcomed into a Church as a Muslim woman. There were many 'first times' for me in Grandchamp. But right from the first prayer in the Chapel of the Beatitudes and then in the Chapel of the Ark, I felt the presence and the love of God. The simplicity and modesty of the sisters' habit touched my heart as a sign of humility before God. I often went to one of the chapels in the daytime to pray on my own.

Today the welcome is still the same ; the Community has grown bigger and more modern. I still have my place as in the beginning. I always learn a lot through hearing the Gospel readings in the Offices. There I find many parallels with the Koran. I love the Beatitudes, they are so deep and true. I would like to hear them each morning so that they accompany me day and night.

What draws me to Grandchamp is a sort of need for serenity and peace. It is a place I would have liked to live if I had not been so deeply Muslim. It is a place of renewal and I need it. When I went to Mecca and faced the Kaaba, I prayed for all the sisters both the living and the ones who had already gone before us into the Light.

May God protect you and keep you in peace and fullness of life

Lallia

On Sunday the 29th August, our dear friend Lallia died two days after a stroke here in Grandchamp. She was struck down on a Friday, the 20th day of Ramadan, and

she died on a Sunday at the hour of Muslim morning prayer. Her whole life is summed up in those two symbolic days.

*

« There are three truths :
your truth, my truth and the truth. » Tierno Bokar

Today Islam provokes often fear and animosity that can lead to a global rejection of the Arab-Muslim world. For us it is important to keep an open heart to an authentic Islam and to be respectful of our differences. When he spoke of a disciple of Tierno Bokar, Theodore Monod said : « He was a Muslim and I was a Christian but our

religious convictions converged towards the same direction ». We could say the same thing about Lallia. In her deep faithfulness to prayer and reading of the Koran, she had widened her heart and she showed us a glowing face of Islam. Her death here calls us to witness to the fact that we all belong to a great cloud of believers. We have the possibility to open up new spiritual horizons. We have the choice to open our hearts, or not to open them, to discover a spirit-filled Islamic mysticism that will lead us to be more deeply rooted in our own prayer life. We will be able to open up the treasures of our faith to our Muslim friends, without trying to convert them, without being afraid, in a simple act of sharing our mutual riches. By doing this, we will open up 'spiritual spaces of lasting joy, peace and trust'.

* * *

Fasting, Ecology and Spirituality

Every year we hold a retreat called 'Fasting and Prayer' with Sister Christianne and doctor Wilhelmini de Toledo. Next summer 2011 will be the thirtieth time we offer this retreat. Fasting is practised in most religious traditions, and today fasting is surely a privileged way of helping us to find our rightful place in creation. It is also an invitation to share. A member of this summer retreat, specialist in environmental sciences, makes the connection between ecology, fasting and spirituality :

You may decide to fast for all kinds of reasons : for example to seek physical and spiritual well-being or to help in practicing meditation. But fasting is an experience that leads you to discover things that you could never imagine beforehand. Fasting also enables spiritual experience. In the face of anxiety and a sense of failure, avoiding oneself, constant projection into future dreams or past regrets, a sense of being always crushed into a confined space and time, in face of our exhausting frustrations and dissatisfactions, fasting may offer 'emptiness' as an alternative, a slowing down, an interiority, inner changes, feeling, sensation or emotion, and to live them in awareness. Fasting frees up space that allow us to be aware of all dimensions of our being, body, mind and spirit, so that gradually, we can reach a dimension within us which is not so much we perceive but rather what we trust. Leaving aside our efforts and being carried by whatever comes, we reach within us silence and trust. We glimpse the possibility of living the present moment rather a race towards death.

Even more essential to me, fasting has been a way of learning anew how to nourish myself and to be conscious of what eating really means. And if there is one thing that our expanding and abundant society hides away from all conscious thought, it is what eating actually means. Fasting on the other hand, in itself, puts a stop to actions that we do automatically several times a day : thoughtlessly eating no matter what, when and how. We do this without every thinking of the people and the elements without whom no food could be processed.

Starting to eat again is to continue in the awareness brought about by fasting. As we eat, we can re-establish our links with other people and with the Earth. So we begin to realise that simply as consumers we destroy ourselves, others and the Earth, and that being a consumer is not only a matter of eating...

Dominique Bourg

* * *

Grandchamp through the eyes of a builder

Over the last months much repair work has been undertaken both inside and outside our houses. Thus we have been able to live alongside and get to know quite well the people who worked on the different work sites. One of these, the building contractor, has been kind enough to share some of his reflections with us:

Grandchamp is an historical hamlet that today is occupied mainly by a community of religious sisters. For years now the sisters have taken care to preserve this place in a spirit of what is called today 'sustainable development'. They are sensitive to the natural surroundings, to the environment, to the work be done well and to traditions.

This place of calm and of listening, reflection and tolerance is refreshing for me each time I come here. In my day's work I am reminded of the essentials, and the economic problems of the world are put into perspective. Contacts with the sisters, the kind way they treat us, their modesty as well as the faith they express, allow me to cope with daily situations from a different point of view.

In the very 'masculine' world of building, relationships between our work force and the sisters, meant adjusting values. Image has no meaning here, priorities are different and true values come to the fore, driving out rivalry. Human beings again find their rightful place.

As we have done our work here in Grandchamp we have tried to respect the site in terms of style and materials, and with the very best quality and fairest prices in order to achieve work that lasts. Trying to do this, always presents us with professional challenges that stimulate and help us to improve our work. Nowadays, giving our personnel the chance to improve their skills and to pass on their expertise in traditional techniques and materials to the young generation, for example in stone work, will guarantee permanent training and the future of the work force.

Working with a trusted group of craftsmen has allowed us, and will surely enable us in the future, to preserve, maintain and develop the Grandchamp site for many years to come. This building work has meant constraints for the sisters, but with the aid and the ideas and help of valued supporters, they will be able to carry on adapting their buildings to respond to their needs into the future.

In addition to trusting me professionally, the sisters asked me to write about my thoughts and experience, which has touched me deeply. May I here thank the whole community for that.

Urs Hübscher

* * *

Pray and Work...

In last year's newsletter, 2009, Renaud and Sang Wha gave us an idea of what they had experienced as volunteers in Grandchamp. It is quite true we have always welcomed women, sometimes men and mostly young people, who have wanted to experience this life of sharing prayer and work with us. Today we are amazed, and more especially full of wonder, to see how many volunteers from such different horizons have joined us recently and still continue to do so. These people are surely a tangible sign of God's watching over us and providing for our needs in a time when the Community sees its own strength diminishing. Such times of sharing, weeks sometimes months, are mutually very enriching. Last August, we had the joy of welcoming back about 15 of our former volunteers for a weekend, in a simple and moving reunion.

No, the Lord of the harvest has not failed to send plenty of workers, both men and women, into our 'Big Field' of Grandchamp ! We also remember the precious and frequent help of members of our spiritual family : the SU and the Third Order of Unity. This without naming the whole network of people who discreetly support us with their professional know-how in so many ways, and Mrs Laurinda whom we employ to help us with the cooking. We need to accept the actual situation that is ours today, with real limits that opens into an unexpected wealth.

... Do not be afraid to extend the space of your tent !

This extending of our tent also invites us to another process of enlarging: that of our life and some of our customs. Enlarging our tent, sharing our prayer and our work implies constant learning and adjusting. This involves our relations with our spiritual family; with the people who come seeking their way in life; the young who are thirsting for a satisfying and happy life in a world that is in mid-transition and where religions and cultures have to learn to dialogue and to live together. A living body is never alone but always in a relationship of interdependence and exchange with the world around it. It is a challenge and an adventure that invites us to be very flexible and to dare to give room to the other. As, for example, when once during our Council, the group of volunteers prepared for us a sundayevening prayer with many Taizé songs ! Will we be attentive to the newness that is emerging, in this our own way of life ?

*

What is new often grows quietly through your signs of friendship and the way you share faith and life...
the gift and grace of communion that spreads far beyond what is visible.

The Sisters of Grandchamp.

Communauté de Grandchamp
Grandchamp 4 ; CH - 2015
AREUSE
CCP 20-2358-6
(for France: Dijon 6 225 36 H)