

An everlasting Goodness



Newsletter from Grandchamp 2011

« *Plant your seed in the ground... wait and hope...* »

Sister Marguerite received this word, trusting in the One who called her, and she committed her whole life to this adventure of faith that is the community. 2011 is the year that marks the 75th anniversary of her first arrival in Grandchamp, as well as the 50th year since Mother Geneviève died and entered into the light of God's presence. So we took time to remember, not to shut ourselves off in nostalgic memories of the past, but to situate ourselves, as the whole of Scripture invites us to do, before what God has done, before all 'his wonders'. This kind of remembering prepares us to recognise his presence still at work today, and to let ourselves be challenged and led on still further, because God never ceases to do new things. So this remembering disposes us to welcome what is to come with trusting hearts.

Our memory of the humble ways God first intervened in History and in our personal lives opens the way to thanksgiving. So we wanted to celebrate what God has done and rejoice with others, in particular members of the families of Sr Marguerite and Mother Geneviève, and to give thanks together:

* For the seed planted **yesterday** thanks to the retreats organised since 1931 ; for the boldness of faith of our first sisters; for the rich harvest that came from the meeting and friendship of Mother Geneviève and Sr Marguerite; their openness to what God wanted them to accomplish.

* For the community **today**, for the grace of our common prayer, of living with different generations, with the diversity of our backgrounds, languages and cultures, denominational traditions... a gift, a challenge, a call: living unity in diversity, a parable of communion. Today just like yesterday, it's up to us to look more to God than to ourselves, to our weakness or our limits. We are so small, but that suffices, when we offer it to Christ, to the breath of the Spirit: '*just plant your seed...*'. We can then share with many others what we have received from God.

* For **tomorrow**, this future that God is already preparing for us. We do not know what it will consist of, but we do know that Christ goes before us and journeys with us.

A prayer inspired by Psalm 143, and chosen as the theme of the Council and the year, accompanies us '*Let the breath of your Spirit of goodness lead us to a unified land*'.

It is a prayer invoking the spirit of God *'that is present everywhere and fills all things'* that makes all things new in us and around us. The Spirit does not impose, but remains discreet, leaving space for our freedom, and comes to renew the face of the earth through hearts that are open, hearts that waken to the Spirit's presence and allow themselves to be transformed.

Let the breath... Among the images describing the Holy Spirit, that of breath evokes a lightness, a freshness – the light breeze that comes to caress your face – gentle, tender, discreetly real... like *'the sound of sheer silence'* that Elijah perceived and that spoke to him of God's Presence.

... of **your Spirit**... God is infinite goodness. He wants only what is good, fullness of life for each of his creatures. He does not turn a blind eye to evil and its ravages, but his gaze goes further. He discerns goodness *'deeper than the deepest evil'* (Ricoeur). The goodness of heart in a human being is the reflection of the goodness of God. A priceless gift, a fruit of the Spirit! Let's just imagine for a moment a kindhearted look posed on us, and its effects ! Does not it correspond in each one of us to our most secret desire : to be loved ?

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... **lead** us... It is in being carried by that breath of goodness that we can go forward, letting ourselves be led in the everyday routine of our lives, and, like Jesus abandoning ourselves to it. We have to learn day after day to let go of the reins, to accept losing control over life, over events, a control that reassures us in that deep insecurity that is often within us, and also closes us in on ourselves. The breath of God's spirit wants to set us free. Would our life not then become like a journey in an air balloon? In his story of crossing the Atlantic, B. Piccard describes this adventure towards the unknown that removes the usual landmarks and obliges the traveller to *'go with the flow'* but at the same time to keep very alert in order to catch the breeze that propels him in the right direction. Other winds could enable him to go quicker but at the risk of going astray, far from the chosen destination.

... **to a unified land** ; the image refers both to the unification of our own inner ground, and the unity amongst us, in order to extend our vision towards the reconciliation of the whole human family, of all that is created, towards the reconciliation of the whole universe as foretold by the prophets. Christ gave his life to reconcile all things, but he does not take our place. He calls us to enter into the gift of God, to let his good spirit breathe in us, to expand our hearts.

'Let the breath of your Spirit of goodness lead us to a unified land'

Let us allow the words of this prayer to resonate in us, live in us, inspire us. And may this breath of goodness that inspired the beginnings of our community give

us today again boldness of faith, renew us in the gift of our own life as we follow in the steps of Jesus Christ.

Sister Pierrette

A seed of gratitude...

A DAY OF THANKSGIVING

28th August

The 28th August was a day bathed in soft light. With the families of sister Marguerite and of Mother Geneviève and a few other close friends of the Community, we were able to remember and rejoice in what these two women with such outstanding personalities had brought to each of us by their gifts and their influence. We could quite simply rejoice at being all together, meeting one another, discovering one another. Laure-Anne, a great grand niece of Sister Marguerite and of Mother Geneviève gives us a little echo of that day of celebration.

The sky is almost royal blue, the air so clear and wonderfully fresh on this celebration day. The sisters, all dressed in white, welcome us with that radiant smile we know them by. This is a really special day as it commemorates the birth of the community. It is a special day for me too. In memory of two of my great aunts, nearly a hundred people, all descendants of theirs, have gathered around, with the sisters of the community. It is a time to rejoice together in the seed sown seventy-five years ago by Sister Marguerite, watered and tended by Mother Geneviève, and by all the sisters since then. What a pleasure to meet uncles and aunts, close and distant cousins in a context of such great spiritual beauty.

The day starts with a celebration of the Eucharist in the *Arche* Chapel, where the sun-beams dance through the stained glass windows. After the reading from the Gospel, Brother François of Taizé speaks so truly, reminding us that it is quite 'normal' to do what God calls us to, that which each of us in our own lives have agreed to, in saying 'yes'. There is nothing exceptional about that, just as there is no reason to praise one's husband because he is there day after day... Brother François even made us all laugh, and that reminded me very much of Aunt Marguerite, as we used to call her at home. I remember her sparkling eyes and her air of mischief, when we went to see her in her little home in Taizé. We used to go regularly to Taizé as a family right from when I was very young (Brother Roger was my father's uncle, so we were very close.) On every visit, we never missed spending time with our Aunt Marguerite. She loved laughing with us children. And we were always impressed by the simplicity and joy that radiated from that little house.

After a convivial meal with the community, there was a surprise waiting for us in the *Arche* chapel, by now transformed into a theatre set. The sisters performed their show, entitled 'Remember your future', for us. It was a play narrating in poetry, humour, dance and music the vision of Sister Marguerite, her vocation, and her request to Geneviève Micheli to kindly come and help to orchestrate it all. It was marvellous to see the sisters displaying their talents as comic

actors. The past, the present and the future all rubbed shoulders. And the white oxeye daisy became multicoloured, reflecting the richness of the colours that make up the white. Isn't white the colour that comes from mixing light of all colours? It is the light that floods into the heart of every person who has the good fortune to pass at Grandchamp, the heart of those who, like me, feel a spiritual bond with the community.

On behalf of the two families, a big flowery thank you for that beautiful day !

Laure-Anne Dayer

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... A seed of hope

Once again Julia, our friend from Guatemala, gifted us with her presence for some weeks in the summer. We were able to have some intense and some festive moments with her- like the party on the 28th August! - and to rejoice in this longstanding friendship, in so many joys and sufferings shared in deep communion, and bear with her the testing times and the hopes of her people.

SIGNS OF HOPE ... IN A DARK LAND

Guatemala - a dark land ? For more than 60 years the country has been, and still is, subject to waves of violence : the war between the guerrilla forces and the army that lasted for 36 years, genocide against the Mayan people, torture, kidnapping, inhuman and degrading

treatment legitimised by the State and the oligarchy... the consequences of this systematic violence are growing poverty, reversals in education, reinforcement of unjust economic and social structures, the institutionalisation of impunity, and much insecurity and suffering.

Were not Jesus' contemporaries, and Jesus himself, familiar with such injustice ? Already in those days, men and women were oppressed and poor, and Jesus chose to stand by them in a very special way. That's why I feel hopeful and grateful. I am deeply convinced that God, in Jesus, still becomes incarnate in the poor, those who are naked and hungry and thirsty... I am hopeful because His Word is truth.

« Then the righteous will answer him : 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink ?' ... And the king will answer them : 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me ' » (Matthew 25 : 37-40).

Dispersed all over Guatemala, poor people have put their hope in the God of life, the God of Jesus. Their faith and their resistance are strong signs of hope for me, seeds of peace. And so also is the commitment in word and action of non-believers who carry in their own flesh the pain, the humiliation, the hunger and struggle of the destitute, and thus witness to their deep humanity. And there are so many women who, driven by their love of life, work loyally and struggle for justice with honesty and a great deal of faith.

There are numerous groups and little communities (such as small farmers, weavers, craftspeople...) who stand up not only for women's rights, but also for the supreme right to life, and the respect of the earth and all creation. All these people are living witnesses to the unique power of God: the power of Love, and that is why they are invincible. That is the biggest sign of life and hope.

The One who overcame death and rose again is the same One who was crucified, betrayed, insulted, forsaken. However God himself was in him, passing through the same experience. Being saved is not being freed from all suffering but living it, knowing that He suffers it with me in the depths of my being, and that already the power of Resurrection is at work in me.

*I am no longer afraid of death,
For I know full well
Its dark cold corridor
That leads to life.
But I fear the life
That does not flow forth from death,
That halts our hands
And hinders our journey.
I am afraid of my fear...*

*I live each day to kill death
I die each day to give birth to life,
And in this death of death
I die a thousand times
And rise again as often
Since it is love that feeds
The hope of my people!
(in 'Notre Père du Guatemala')*

Julia

FROM LOOKS TO SMILES, AT THE HOME 'LA LORRAINE'

A poetic text by a carer in the Residential Care Home La Lorraine, where three of the sisters have lived in the last year, reflecting on the effect of their presence others there.

Sister Ruth arrived clouded in those autumnal mists that come before the end time that is both awaited and dreaded ; then Sister Eva Maria came, eyes sparkling with her full heartedness ; she gave the same blue habit a different, unexpected allure ; amazement at how one same presence can have a plurality of faces ! Then Sister Albertine came to join this 'fraternity of fortune', awaking the memory of the community's discreet and determined presence in the outside world, in a former life in factories or on other continents, suddenly bringing their fraternal presence very near to humanity in work and poverty, perhaps.

Light gives rise to understanding, then one day it dazzles and begins to burn before misting over with irrevocable losses : passiveness so that one can no longer make choices, acceptance, letting go as a final act of freedom; being dependent, becoming the task of another who has the advantage over you, partly shadow, partly a handicap, who leads your life to the edge of the unknown with its accompanying fears and apprehension ; the categorical appeal that quietly tells you in rather a cowardly way : « things can't go on like this ! ».

Still too soon to say there is no hope, this is a place where earth and heaven meet, an horizon with the consistency of life; in the heart of this impasse there still rises up a sign that teaches us, a pathway for humanity, modestly revealed in conviction and loyalties, in the fragility of an essential dependency, without resignation or abdication.

Thus, 'little flowers from Grandchamp', you arrived in the smooth and sterile spaces of a nursing home, and your presence in the fabric of the most intimate of daily tasks allowed the hard stone in the infinitely soft and subtle fruit to break open. Leaven in spite of ourselves, we embark on a Noah's Ark that gives to the horizon of our lives the form of a rainbow, revealing in it hidden colours, and together in light we are enabled to enter, without realising it, into the being that holds us, that looks after us almost in spite of ourselves ; almost, because our freedom, which is scarcely recognisable, has dressed in the humblest of clothes, namely acceptance of an inescapable condition shared, the recognition of the deep pathway of the heart ...

Sisters, our friends become sisters in humanity, in fellowship with Jesus Christ the filigree of their days, a light in the dark bewilderment, a face that gives each one the infinite altitude of the heart, in the most unpretentious way, through attention to a gesture, a look, and silence towards the one who comes. And then with you on Sundays, *La Lorraine* welcomes in the folds of your blue dresses that have become so familiar, the beautiful Eucharist - a link that in the simplicity

of the explicit gesture, carries the promise of an infinite communion! Thank you.

Christian

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... A seed planted in the ground

A sense of thankfulness... that is what we feel deeply when we think of the welcome that our sisters have received in the Lorraine Home. We are very touched by the attention, the sensitivity and the excellent care of all the nursing team, of Christian, the spiritual co-ordinator. Through regular visits, close bonds of friendship have developed, and these have become stronger since the death of sr Eva Maria on 7th June and sr Ruth on 4th August.

And we extend our thanks now to all of you who have expressed your friendship and communion with us in these two bereavements.

* * *

In the retreat at the Council, Brother François invited us to be thankful :

« It is only by being grateful that we discover the extent, the strength itself, the nourishing strength, of all that God has given us ».

It is gratitude that gives weight to everything that we have received and that we receive each day, that gives true value to your friendship, your prayer, your support. Gratitude that gives flavour to our meetings and times of sharing... Quite simply, thank you to each and every one of you !

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Wait and hope ...

In the end a special thank you to our neighbours... also to sr Françoise for all the energy and talents expended making the exhibition of photos showing the history of the hamlet of Grandchamp over the last 250 years. The exhibition delighted a large number of people many of whom were former pupils of the secondary school that our property once housed.

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It is the deep meaning of this new Advent season, a time of deepening of our desire and waiting for the One who is coming, in the heart of our darkness, to open a way of light and peace.

To each and one of you we send our best wishes for a blessed Christmas celebration, for a new year sustained by the breath of his Spirit of Goodness.

The sisters of Grandchamp

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On the Website
www.grandchamp.org
you will find our programme for 2012,
as well as our reading lists