

Christmas Letter by Fr Yves LaFontaine 2018

Dear brother/friend,

I thought I should send you a few words and my best wishes at the approach of Christmas and the New Year. We've been separated since quite a bit of time, especially those of you who live in South Africa. In fact, longer than I ever could imagine.

First, I fully enjoyed my home leave. I visited many – not all – of my family members and of my numerous friends – for the simple reason that I spent many a year here as a Missionary of Mariannahill. It was really pleasant to get updated about this or that one. Everybody gets older of course. Some who were very small at the time are now married, others have moved; some got sick unfortunately, others have lost their parents, even a spouse or a child, and others have had new children. Such is life!

I have visited more especially my immediate family of course. I even had to attend a funeral. Indeed, I lost one of my sisters-in-law, actually my favorite one. To be honest with you, on that occasion I got a “*secular chock*,” if I may use that expression. That funeral was a purely civil funeral. I had nothing to do at all in it. A strange feeling when this happens in one's own family! We were all brought up in a very good family! And yet! This is an indication of the extent to which our society here has become secular.

I was supposed to return to Mariannahill at the end of last July, but, as you all know by now I suppose, I am still in exile here in my homeland – strange to say! I had sent to the Home Affairs my request for the lifting up of my penalty with regard to the renewal of my visa even before arriving here in Canada, at the very beginning of May, perfectly on time. But since that time, some 7 ½ months ago, it has been a battle to find out what to do next in the hope of finding a way to get some kind of response from the Home Affairs. So far it has been a complete failure. I am being completely ignored.

In case you were looking for a kind of spiritual exercise to make you grow in holiness more rapidly, I could suggest to you that of being completely ignored by your own society. It's a nice feeling that prompts you to realize to what extent you are a “*nobody*” so to say, better still, such a “*small being*” that you can be forgotten somewhere without any real consequence. I am exaggerating of course, in the very perspective of the Christian faith even, for no matter how small we are in the eyes of our Father in heaven, we are all unique and indispensable.

We know it, but we need to realize that we have to become in fact like a child, the child Jesus in the stable, to bear fruits of redemption. This is the merit of my suggestion: it brings back to us the essence of the Christmas experience, as lived by the great saints like St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross, the Curé d'Ars, Blessed Engelmar, and the others, who showed us brilliantly the necessity of lowliness, littleness, humility, self-abasement, even self-renunciation and spirit of sacrifice. In other words, I was regularly faced with the necessity of becoming again and again an icon of the child Jesus, and to entrust myself more and more into the hands of My Father in heaven. I need just to be a child. Nothing more, nothing less!

Maybe, after all, this is why I was sent here at this time in my life! To learn even more about the truth of the mystery of Christmas. And I do it in a properly Canadian climate, where all is white around me and we have reached so far minus 15 Celsius. The worse is still coming. But we also got rain some days earlier in the winter. Let's hope snow will cover everything around us at Christmas.

To be honest, I would still like to get my visa as soon as possible. But, again, I am in the hands of my Father. He knows what's best for me. But this does not prevent me from doing something obviously.

On the other hand, since about two weeks, I have more hope that something will "one day" happen since my dossier is now in the hands of a priest who deals personally with the Home Affairs on behalf of the missionaries who have special problems, just like me. In other words, there is at least some founded reason to hope for a positive result...one day.

I was able to see some doctors and my dentist. So I should be in a better shape upon my return, even though I should also see an ophthalmologist to check my eyes and tell me whether or not I should be operated now or later for the cataracts. Unfortunately it seems I won't be able to get the answer before I return since the list of patients I am on is much too long.

I leave you with those few news and wish you most sincerely a most Blessed Christmas and New Year 2019.

God bless you abundantly!

Fr. Yves La Fontaine, CMM