

Pater Yves LaFontaine schreibt aus Mariannhill, Südafrika April 2017

19 April 2017

Dear friends,

Honour to whom honour is due! First and foremost, the Risen Lord. I wish you an excellent Easter time, rich in peace and joy. May this period grant you the gift of an always positive look on life and on your own lives and experiences! Life always has the last word.

This year, the holy week did not grant me any respite. How could it have done this? Being the chaplain of our convent in Mariannhill, I had special celebrations almost every day of the week. Actually, I could have been exempted from Good Friday's ceremony, but at the Monastery, they got hold of me – we are only a few priests here. And then, on Wednesday a funeral was added to the load of my celebrations. But I survived. Deo gratias!

This regular ministry to our sisters keeps me busier than I had anticipated. Apart from the daily celebrations, I must visit the sick sisters in the infirmary. I also resumed my teaching to the novices. Our new group is composed of five novices, two from Zambia and three from Kenya. I must say that I am dynamized by the fact that it is one of the best groups – if not the best – I ever had to date. Up to now, they are dynamic in the classroom, with good dispositions and authentically interested. Sometimes, I also have confessions in parishes. In addition, next month I will have a wedding. I don't have them often for I am not well known here around, thanks be to God, this on account of the nature of my main task. This time it is a member of my Rotary club. I could not refuse.

Something else now. And something of another nature. I am without a land line phone since practically the beginning of the year. Here, it's the third world in that field. It's a bit difficult to imagine that because South Africa is one of the most developed countries of the whole Africa. But it's a fact. How often I called the company, I don't know anymore. I even phoned sometimes every two days. I will start again to annoy them after I have finished this circular. I am told that they will take care of my case, but it falls into a void. I call back, they tell me another story, then, the day after, it's another explanation. And so on. Part of the problem lies in the fact that the company cannot rely on its employees. Therefore each one is sent for a very specific task, and only for that one. So, often the employee repairs a line, yes, but at the same time damages another one, so old is the system. How many times this did happen! Fortunately, most of the time I can at least get the signal of the Provincial's office and can therefore use the internet. When he has a problem, he uses mine...when it functions of course. I shall see. This means that if you wish to reach me by phone, and do not succeed, you have to use my cellular number, which is 071.506.5860.

I rambled from one area to the next. Yes, unfortunately! I am a bit in a hurry, excuse me. Here we celebrated the beatification of our Fr. Engelmar Unzeitig on last 2 February because our Provincial arrived a bit late after the general chapter. I had to prepare hastily a special prayer for the occasion. All went well. I now pray to him every day for some of you. I have a rather long list of names. I always pray before going to bed. I am very faithful in enumerating all the names and cases on my list.

Last 9 April we had the privilege of offering something unique in the area, and even in the country. A private company, The Durban Players Guild (the actors are all volunteers), executes the passion every year according to a mitigated model of Oberammergau in Germany.

The actors use the cloister of our Monastery to this end. It is the second time that the show is presented within our walls. It will continue in the future. A contract has been signed to that end between the company and us. A unique show! The company puts its material into storage here.

Let's now move to the marvellous and enchanting world of South African politics. Since some time already the tune «Zuma must go» is played over and over again on the radio. But our president never goes. Lately his party, the ANC, finally decided not to ask for his resignation, this after the opposition of a growing number of its tenors and of other public personalities of various groups and following a downfall of our economy and currency. The problem is that if one attacks Zuma from inside the party, the latter knows too much about them. In addition, he has too many good friends. This is to say that the crisis is not only that of a president battling against corruption and maladministration, it's that of a whole party. And it is the same Zuma who in 2009 spoke eloquently about the need of a moral code for the nation.

Our country is going through a difficult period from the political and economic points of view. Our President has sent back home his Finance Minister, who had the confidence of the great financial institutions and of the developed countries. Furthermore, he changed several other members of his cabinet. This was marked by a lack of transparency, but above all by a very negative impact on the value of the Rand. Obviously, the masses of the poor are most affected by that, certainly not the "Zuma gang." It was such a crisis that all the newspapers were talking only about that. The Church too has moved in this protest through the conference of the bishops, the Jesuit magazine and the South African Catholic newspaper, the Southern Cross, declaring that it was a matter of vital interest for all the South Africans. Corruption, mismanagement and incompetence are unfortunately a matter of the ANC itself. The President and his gang are just trying to safeguard their own financial interests. This is largely recognized now.

Lately, important voices within the ANC have issued a forthright criticism of Mr Zuma and his backers, most significantly that of the secretary-general, Gwede Mantashe, and parliamentary chief whip, Jackson Mthembu. This indicates that there is finally a groundswell within the ANC that is prepared to challenge Mr Zuma. But we can take some comfort in knowing that things could be so much worse, like in some other countries. Here at least journalists who reveal our state of corruption or commentators who speak out against it are not arrested and put into prison. The press freedom still allows for the corruption to become public knowledge. This said, even if this freedom exists, it would be consoling ourselves much too easily to be content with a situation in which the survival of the President and of its group is more important than the good of the nation. We even witnessed the last weeks a number of protest marches in the big cities of the country. But one must also say that the supporters of the President have also marched. We are waiting now to see if the members of the ANC in parliament will be able to enjoy the right of the secret vote when the time comes for the vote of non-confidence submitted by the opposition parties. We shall see.

Finally, a few words on the social situation. It did not improve unfortunately since my last circular letter. Violence and serious criminal offences have not stopped. They continue. Around Mariannhill too.

In good Canadian that I am, I must not forget the weather. Our summer got extended significantly this year. It didn't want to end. My Lent was therefore very long. Actually, it finally ended the last days – so it seems at least; I cross my fingers. All of a sudden, last Thursday, we moved from summer to winter without any notice. I had to take out my winter blanket for I was shivering in my bed. So, we are beginning our autumn now. I hope it will last as long as possible since I am an autumn man, a man of the before-death. The climate suits me very well.

I would not like to make you believe that all is going bad here. No, no, South Africa is such a beautiful country, full of good people. My friendships at the Rotary Club and the beautiful youth I happen to meet sometimes remind me of that constantly. It's only sad that there are still so many poor, a situation that creates the violence I spoke about.

I stop here, otherwise, it will be a book that I will have to read. To each and every one of you my best and cordial greetings.

Until next time.

Fr. Yves La Fontaine, CMM