

Pater Yves LaFontaine schreibt aus Mariannhill, Südafrika - Dezember 2017

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Dear friends,

How to begin if not by telling you that I am fine health wise? Obviously, since the only absolute in life is God, I carry the physical weight of my age, which as it goes on, takes a progressively damaging toll on me.

Should I give in to complain, it would be to share with you that very unfortunately the high temperatures are arriving very quickly. That will be the occasion for me to do my lent fast before you all since that heat burdens me so much. But because I committed so many sins in my life, I guess I must redeem myself? No? Actually I already started to do so because we already had a few of those days.

Regarding my work, I am diligent with serving our dear sisters of the Mariannhill Convent. I say mass there each and every day the Good Lord grants me and I regularly visit the sick ones. I also continue to play the professor with our novices. We have five this year (3 from Zimbabwe and 2 from Kenya). In addition, I also assist the new Director of the Emaus Heritage Centre, in particular with its publications. Finally, I help in other various ways here at the Monastery (occasional masses at the Monastery and with the deaf community, confession, counselling, etc.).

Evidently, a place like the Monastery is victim of its celebrity. We receive many people here and also offer many activities. Last weekend, for instance, we had a pre-Christmas show, Carols in Candlelight – I was asked to be the presenter – a Baroque Christmas concert, Ecumenical Vespers and another program of music and theatre within the frame of the Mariannhill Festival. If it ever happens you have nothing to do, welcome here.

Talking about temperature, in October our region has experienced a ferocious storm. The death of two people at the very least was confirmed; we witness many dramatic rescues; so many cars were seriously damaged; innumerable houses were flooded and full of walls crashed down. I console myself with the fact that here at the Monastery we got off rather lightly; and that other places in the worlds were also plagued by bad weather. We were not the only ones!

There is no lack of life here. No. Many of our religious come this way for business; our candidates and postulants do the same for other reasons; groups of tourists, small, medium size and big, come one after the other; and other groups – of youth especially – come to board at our Mission Centre. The image of the accordion often crosses my mind when I think of our dining room because its population often goes from widening to narrowing.

Now, the major component of my apostolate, the process of beatification of the founder of Mariannhill, Abbot Francis Pfanner. This should be in fact my main occupation, but unfortunately it is not, at least at the moment. I am still delayed in that task by some others left stranded. I wholeheartedly hope to be able to immerse myself again in that process as soon as possible in 2018.

Imagine, I had the occasion to take a short holiday of a week in October. We got German visitors and I was the only one who could manage to speak “some” German with them – Bro. Konrad was home in Germany - and therefore could accompany them in visiting. We travelled some 3,000 kilometres, touring the network of the main old mission stations built by the Trappists. I wouldn’t have chosen that for my vacation, but after all, why not? For a long time already I had entertained the idea of re-visiting those missions. We visited the stations of Mariathal, Einsiedeln, St. Isidore, Emaus, Lourdes, Reichenau, Centocow, Mariazell, Maria Linden, Fairview, Mount Fletcher, Mthatha, St. Michael and Mariatrost. We also made a stop at our very latest mission, our retreat centre, Coolock House.

I now move to a different chapter, that of our social and political situation. It’s not that I want to darken on purpose the extraordinarily beautiful country of South Africa. No. It’s only that it is a reflection of many forms of darkness of our present world, which here are directly under our eyes, as raw material and not as refined maybe as in your North of the world. Not a complete picture therefore! Far from that! A list of facts is perhaps the best way to give you an idea – only an idea of course – of the situation.

Our dear President, Mr. Zuma, already survived nine votes of no confidence in parliament. He was charged with 783 counts of fraud, money laundering and racketeering at the time the national director of prosecutions decided to discontinue prosecution against him in 2009. This was eight years ago!

Inside the same party, the ANC - his party -, groups of opponents go to court to settle their disputes. In only one month three politicians were shot dead in that same party. And ten in the course of the past year. Disagreements on some points, so be it, but the fact that people go as far as killing is proof that there is something terribly important at stake. O yes, there is money. And not just peanuts! That party is riddled with corruption and at the mercy of the appetite for power. There is vote buying. All this is a generally accepted truth by all the serious observers.

So much so that now many people voice their opposition to this situation. And that a strong opposition to corruption is slowly taking shape, even within the party. There is no choice if the party wishes to still govern in the future. But the patient is still far, very far, from a complete cure.

I continue. One in three children experiences violence in S.A., and one in five school goes sexual violence. In May, a mini-bus collided head-on with a bakkie. Eight people were killed in the crash and four injured. On it was written “Powered by Jesus”. It would have been better to do what Jesus would have done, drive more carefully. These minibuses are like a tumor in the body of public transport.

Closer to us, in June, one of our young confreres was rushed to hospital after having been severely stabbed in his arm and left hand by a group of thugs who wanted to steal his mobile and some money.

In September we woke to land invaders attempting to take possession of part of our land here at the Monastery (around our Mater Dolorosa and near St. Mary’s hospital). The matter had to be reported urgently to the municipal office and the police, so as to officially warn them that they were illegally occupying private land and had to vacate it with immediate effect. They obeyed and left, but early the following morning, they tried again. So did another group of them. One must know that this is another plague of our dear country.

Another fact. In November, close to 2,000 people were left homeless after a shack fire spread rapidly in a neighboring shanty town. The firefighters were rather rapidly on the spot, but they had to flee when groups of residents turned on them and stabbed their hosepipe, hoping to get water to put out the fire burning their own shacks further away. Meanwhile, the fire raged on. After a while the crowd became desperate because there was no more water available for anybody. The firefighters could return only after the arrival of the police. But it was too late then. This is to say that should they have not had shacks – for lack of anything better – and lived in decent small houses at least, nothing of that would have happened probably. At least, it would not have been such a catastrophe.

OK, enough talking. Let's conclude.

Christmas! God, God himself, becomes a little one! And in his smallness, he still remains great, immensely great; great as an absolute is, as a god is! What a mystery! Yes, a true mystery! But without it, what else do we have to found our existences and give them meaning? That is the great mystery Christmas time invites us, in the hurly-burly of our lives, all centered on themselves, not to suffocate like a useless fire. It rather calls us to admire it, nay, to “contemplate” it until it deeply penetrates our minds and hearts!

To give human explanations to the mystery man is – oh, there are! – can only mean to give it a justification that is the reflection of our own limitations. A limited explanation therefore! One that does not go further! But, as Pascal puts it, «man transcends man». He is more than what his limitations can grasp; he is mystery. And to that mystery there is only one answer acceptable to reason: another mystery, still greater, that can encompass it and give it meaning. Full of meaning!

May you take time to contemplate that mystery! That is my best wish for you all.

Ciao.

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