

April 2009

Dear Family in the Lord,

My doctor told me that he was going on vacation in the desert, "where God is". I told him that God is everywhere, no more so in the desert than anywhere else. But perhaps the good doctor has a point, after all. Not that God is more present in one place than in another, but that His presence is more, well, "felt" in solitary, lonely places. On my early morning walks, I sometimes go to a park nearby. There is rarely anyone about, as it is too early, so I get the whole place to myself. But not really. God is certainly there. I feel Him in the cool silence, in the massive stature of that double row of poplars down the middle of the park, in the subdued, diffused light of the pre-dawn. I talk to Him and I know He listens. And, you know what? When I return home, He is waiting for me there, too. Those moments alone with God in quiet places remind us that He is also right there in the noisy, busy ones.

On the national holiday called "Pentecost Monday" (April 13 this year), we held our 9th annual Church retreat. This retreat sprang from the idea that the assembly needed to have a day each year when we all get together outside of our normal surroundings, or at least outside of our normal activities as a group. The members do get together as families or in different groups (young unmarrieds, for ex.). But this retreat is a time of spiritual renewal for the entire group, as well as a time of getting to know each other better in a general, social setting. The theme this year concerned the "First Commandment," which gave rise to some interesting discussion about the "second" commandment and how best to put it into practice also, in the context of the first commandment. We had a good day of study and prayer, deep discussion and decision-making, individually and collectively.

This month, one of the leaders presented a two-part sermon on authority in the Church. He is one of our best Bible students and also one of our ablest speakers. He did a thorough job, looking at authority from several angles. He demonstrated very clearly the authority of Christ over His Church and the need for all Christians to submit to Jesus and His Word. I tell you this as another in a long list of confirmations of this brother's continuing growth. He has taken on several major responsibilities of the work here and is one of the three we are preparing for the eldership of this congregation a few years down the line. There is solid spiritual growth among the brethren (and "sistren") in the Lyon Church!

Last week, I preached on the deity of Christ, 1) because the Bible is so clear on this all-important subject, and 2) because of the news that several members of one assembly in Belgium have come out against this biblical teaching. Just in case any of our people shared their thinking and eventually their negative attitude about this clear scriptural doctrine, I decided to go over some decisive — I would call them definitive — passages on the subject. The response was very good, as I was essentially "preaching to the converted". But I wanted to make sure. It is my view that people who wear the name of Christ but who cannot be agreed on whether or not he was deity have little else of substance to talk about.

On the third weekend of the month, we hosted the excellent "Chorale Harmonie" from the Church in Marseilles. The Marseilles assembly offers a one-year theological and practical studies curriculum attended by young people from many of our European assemblies (even some American ones). Four of our present members here have been through that program. Every year, students and teachers of the program, along with other members of the Church in Marseilles, form a chorus and sing around Marseilles and do a tour in and around France. This was the 8th year, I believe, that this chorus has come to Lyon. We rent a place for them to sing, usually a Catholic church (often used for concerts here) and

they always do a great job. This time, our little singing group in Lyon joined the Marseilles group for two songs. That made a chorus of about 30 people, and it was a powerful moment.

Last year, a lady in the audience who is also a teacher in a Catholic high school heard the "Chorale Harmonie" sing and asked if they might sing in her school this year. So, after their concert in the evening here in Villeurbanne, where they sang before a rather small audience of about 50, they went the next morning to the St. Bruno Catholic high school on the hill above Lyon and sang to ... 250 students. It was an interesting moment, as this group of Christians sang the Gospel message in an 18th century chapel to a group of "traditional" Catholic young people. Afterward, members of the chorus said that they could see some intense reactions on the faces of those listening. We pray that someone who heard this group sing will have been touched, perhaps for the first time, with the joy and the promise of the everlasting Gospel. That is why this chorus exists; and that is why we invite them to Lyon!

The work on our itinerary for this fall continues. We've run into a couple of hitches, but they can be worked out, I think. I am also preparing the video report, which is a challenge for me. We'll be doing a large amount of travel by car, especially in Ohio and Tennessee, which will be difficult for us, as fibromyalgia and painful knees do not react well to prolonged car travel. We'll see how it goes. At any rate, we are very excited at the prospect of seeing many of you and sharing personally what the Lord is doing here in Lyon and in France.

I told you last month about our Tia planning to come to Lyon to have her 2nd child here, the hospital system being better here than in Italy. Tia was to come in mid-June, but since she is needing to rest more, it has been decided that Jeff will bring her and Ameleah over during the third week of May. That means that Tia and Ameleah will be here for a little over two months before the baby arrives. Jeff will be here during that time as much and as often as his duties will allow. It's a 7-hour car ride, so the next weeks are going to be a bit difficult for all the Brauers. Please pray for them, and for us as we try to do what we can to make the arrival of this baby easier.

Well, friends, I've got lots of work on my desk and on my calendar. "And miles to go before I sleep." And I think that this is probably true for you, as well. (Thanks for reading right to end of this letter.) Laboring for the Lord in His kingdom is a veritable privilege. In spite of aching limbs and diminishing strength and stamina, we find His service a joy, every day! I know you agree. May God bless you and make you smile today, whether you are alone with Him or in the middle of a bustling, noisy crowd!

Sincerely,

Charles and Pam