

- Easter 2013 -

Letter of Jean

You will not believe it:

for three whole days, I am taking a break by the beach at Berck. Odile drove 200 km from Trosly to get me here. The Little Sisters of Jesus have found a small house close to their fraternity, not far from the sea and Berck's huge beaches.

Along these almost deserted beaches, I've had some long, indeed very long walks on the hard sand. Four hours of walking each day by the sea... while the sea itself stretches into infinity. Berck is famous for the healing qualities of its iodine-rich sea air, as well as for the regenerative properties of its ultra-violet radiation. But this spa resort is also known for the «cwak, cwac» of its singing seagulls – musical it ain't! They certainly know how to make their presence felt: flying with such grace, hovering so gently in the air.

It was a joy to have time with the Little Sisters, praying, eating and sharing together. A joy too to be with Little Brother Gerard, a Little Brother of the Gospel. Away from the phone, far away from visits, and things to do, I have really been able to have a good rest as well as taking physical exercise!

At Trosly, I have continued the sessions on the Gospel of John in French and in English. It is a joy to penetrate ever more deeply into the secret of this Gospel and there to discover the mystery of weakness, of Jesus who becomes weak: in L'Arche, we are living in the heart of this fragility. Fragility is part and parcel of human life: we were born in weakness and in weakness we will die. Between these two ends of our lives - birth and death - we grow in strength, in competence and in our autonomy. But it is our weakness that shows us our need for each other, for our friends and community. And given the weakness that others also live with, we can use our own strengths and skills to help them live a better, fuller life. Weakness is also the reason we need the gentle presence of God, who helps us move towards a vision of peace and unity among all human beings.

Obviously, my life is now on the downward slope. Oh my goodness, where is my memory?! I can still remember the texts of John's Gospel, but people's names disappear like water through the sand. And my legs! My legs are gently slowing down. Berck did me a lot of good, in that respect.



Speaking of God's presence, I feel more and more attracted by silent prayer. Jesus said, «remain in my love.» He calls us to stay in his presence. Sometimes, I like to pray early in the morning after waking, while still in my bed; it is a moment of tenderness, just being content to say thank you to God for life, for creation, to thank him for the Lord, and for L'Arche and Faith and Light. I sometimes feel at one with our friends who have already made the passage to heaven, who are waiting for me there. In so many ways I feel spoiled: God has filled my life with friends. I feel loved and my prayer can feel like a hymn of thanksgiving. The gentle moments that I spend in the little oratory at La Ferme are very precious to me.

In her diary, Ety Hillesum says that she feels she is a well and that God is at the bottom of this well. But she says that often the well is filled with stones and rubble, preventing her from meeting God. I feel that too. I certainly feel drawn to inner silence and the presence of God. But often, too often, once the engine of my life has got going, I find it hard to switch it off. Like Ety, I need to remove the stones and debris that prevent me from meeting God in silence. The engine is always trying to whirl into action, over and over again. Just coming to a halt and remaining tranquil presents something of a problem! I still have work to do, so that the Lord knocking at the door of my heart can sup with me and I with him (Rev 3). «Lord, make me rest at the bottom of my heart, there where is found the truth which makes us free.»

I recently had the great pleasure of visiting my sister Therese in London to celebrate her 90th birthday with her and some friends.

Not only is she the founder of L'Arche in the UK but in a very special way she has guided L'Arche on the path of ecumenism. We need to re-read the books that Therese has written on this subject in order to recognise the path that we have traveled. In L'Arche, we are indebted to her for giving us the desire to work for unity among Christians. With her and so many others, we are rejoicing at the appointment of Justin Welby, succeeding Archbishop Rowan Williams as Archbishop of Canterbury. I feel that he and our new pope will get on well together.



I'm still attached to my foyer, Le Val Fleuri for my midday meal and dinner.

It always gives me great joy just to be there. I love the times of celebration, those moments of prayer and sharing together, and above all, the personal meetings which are full of joy and life. I do miss it all when, necessarily, I cannot always be present. I have been with Dédé, Patrick, Ludger, with Michel, Jean Francois and Maxime for over 30 years now, and it is sheer delight to be with them and those who have arrived more recently.

I am taking the opportunity offered by this letter, to say how happy the Trosly community is with our new leader, Christine McGrievy, known to many of you from her time as vice-International Coordinator of L'Arche. She has brought a new dynamism to the community, focusing on the life, growth and involvement of people with disabilities. They bring so much life and invite us all to the heart of the mission of L'Arche, offering our society their gifts and their values, their wisdom about life and their capacity to love. Yes, we are truly living together in communion, in a genuine covenant that transforms each one of us.



Benedict XVI's resignation was a shock, a surprise and at the same time a sign of his wisdom and inner freedom. I have to confess that this gesture of his touched me even more because I had met him in person last November. As I said in my last letter, he came across as a man of such humility and transparency, that same deep humility with which he had first welcomed the mission entrusted him by the Cardinals. Who would take his place, after his departure? Everyone had their own ideas. But yet again, a surprise was in store for us! I did not know the name announced at the time of the new Pope's election, but as soon as I heard the name that he had chosen - Francis - what joy! Unbounded joy! For him to take Francis of Assisi as the vision for his pontificate came out of the blue, as a wonderful surprise.

It is a call to the Church to return to the essence of the gospel, to this simple vision of Francis of Assisi. The new Pope does not tire of repeating that he wants a poor church that is close to the poor. He speaks of the importance of being close to people who are weak and poor, close to them in all tenderness. My heart exults – clearly, he would be at home in L'Arche and Faith and Light, but I think he surely knows them already. Both communities are present in Argentina. Maybe, for me and for all of us, what is vital is that we all become poor and loving, and close to the poorest. Beyond the Pope announcing this vision, the real question for us- me included- is to live it out. Pray for this.



Here, it is almost spring :

nature's time of rebirth. It is also the feast of Easter. After the tunnel of suffering a new birth. May we all live in this hope.

I feel united with all of you,

Jean

