



Circular letter, Christmas 2008

15 December 2008

Dear friends,

I come to you today with my best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Most Blessed New Year 2009 - « holy », that is, lived in harmony with all the essential aspects of the human being, including of course its capacity for the divine. Allow me first however to give you some news, at least to those of you who did not get any or little since a good while.

After my definite return from Rome I stayed in our community of Sherbrooke for a period of time ; there I was busy with our mission procura, our sponsoring of refugees and a bit of formation, which led me to go back to Rome and to Africa last June and July. On the 19th of August I headed for and moved my personal belongings to Gatineau. There is now my new home. Our general government had decided to open an international house of formation in our province and I had been asked to be the formator of the young religious who would be sent there. Then it was decided that this place would be in Gatineau, Québec ; in this way these young religious would study at Saint Paul University, in Ottawa. Once more I team up with Fr. Jean-Claude Drouin, who is the superior of the house. Indeed, we had worked together during many years, actually at the beginning of the 70's.

At the moment we form a community of six members ; four are students. One comes from Poland, one from Nigeria, another one from Kenya and the last one from Colombia. Our common language is French. This means that all must learn French, at least sufficiently well to be able to communicate in daily life. Two of them just finished to attend a French class. They will therefore begin their theology next January. The two others are already at Saint Paul University. You can easily imagine that we must often do like one does with the old ones, that is, to make them repeat. We would not get a better God-given occasion to practice the virtue of patience.

At the moment we do not have a cook. Fr. Jean-Claude is our expert cook. I only take over once in a while. Needless to say that I am only starting out in this most ancient art since I was never placed in a situation where I would have had to cook. But it is never too late to begin, you will say. However to begin at the age of 65 is a challenge, you will agree. I try to take it up, but you can easily imagine that I am not yet a famous chef in French, Chinese or Italian cuisine. Far from that! Sometimes the potatoes stick to the bottom of the pot or the chicken pie is not cooked enough. But

don't worry; I know how to cook eggs and to make toasts and a rather simple salad. We'll see later if we will hire a part-time cook.

We are presently building together our project of life here. I must say that this looks sometimes like a birth pang for us the older ones, for at our age, 65 and 68 respectively, we could be grandfathers to some. As expected we do our best.

I am not homesick in this new country. Maybe this is saddening since you may think that I miss you. I am sorry for this, but you already know that I am not homesick by nature. Not at all. So... Bit by bit I am learning to discover the area, especially the Aylmer sector of Gatineau, where we are situated. This is the old part of Gatineau. We already have some good friends. This is not insignificant.

Let me now convey to you my best wishes. Saint Augustine said: «*Empty yourself so that you can be filled; go out so that you can enter*», and somewhere else, «*O you, noble soul, noble creature, why are you searching outside yourself what is inside, inside altogether, in the truest and most obvious manner? And since you share in divine nature, what do the created things matter to you and what have you to do with them?*» Jean Tauler, a great spiritual of the XIVth century, has quoted these words and commented them in the following way : «*If man prepared himself in this way, God, would be undoubtedly obliged to fill him, completely... God can simply not leave things empty; it would be against his nature and justice.*»

Indeed, «*Empty yourself so that you can be filled.*» This brings a short story to my mind. A woman is asked by a colleague what it means exactly to be a Christian, Here is her answer: «*To be a Christian is like being a pumpkin: God picks it up, he brings it home, in his universe. Then he cleanses it from all the dust of its previous life. Afterwards he removes its top and clears these disgusting things out of its inside. He removes the seeds of doubt, of hatred and of nastiness. Then he gives it a new face, all smiling. Finally, he lays down his light in you so that you can radiate in such a way that the whole world can light its way. Such is roughly Christian life.*» Such is also preparing oneself to the mystery of Christmas! In becoming ourselves pumpkins of God, and thus letting ourselves be emptied of ourselves so that God can invade completely our beings. This is what I wish you, for there is found, in my humble opinion, the whole happiness of man, as paradoxical, incredible and unexpected as this may seem.

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A BLESSED NEW YEAR

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