

St. Emmanuel Parish—Landsend

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Dear Everyone,

Dec. 9, 2009

I have run out of time and I still have gobs to do so I must get this letter out to you all, now, now, now, as they say here.

I don't know why but this has been quite a hectic year. I think that the main worry was regarding the falling-apartness of our Landsend Mission (St. Emmanuel Parish). Like most of the missions, it is getting old and things have been in disrepair for a long time and now we are playing catchup. Along with many other repairs, etc. the main thing was getting the water tower de-rusted and getting a new water tank up on top (I can imagine what it must have been building the pyramids!!!), but once that was done, I was relieved. When it came to paying the bill (R32,000), I asked for and got help from lots of friends but especially from the ex-seminarians from St. Bernard's Seminary, who were gathered together in a reunion, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founder of Mariannahill's death (Abbot Francis Pfanner). He was a man of incredible energy and vision and we are trying to carry on where he left off. He was as much concerned about the physical well being of people as he was about their spiritual well being. He started schools (St. Francis College—[high school] is 100 yrs. old this year, for both boys and girls), introduced a printing press (this is over 100 yrs. ago), taught people modern farming methods, and tried, through his community members, to improve the lives of all the people wherever he established missions. Teachers unions, workshops to train people in carpentry, brick laying, painting, farming, tailoring, etc. etc. etc. He was way ahead of his times. Now the government has taken over most of these and is doing, unfortunately, a poor job of things, I think mostly because the same motivation to be dedicated is just not here to day.

I have just finished reading Obama's "The Audacity of Hope" and I am inspired by what he has to say. I wish that those who like to call him a baby-killer, would take the time to look a bit more deeply into his thinking and character.

I am not a supporter of the war in Afghanistan and feel sorry for Obama who seems to be caught between a rock and a hard place, having inherited a situation that is so sticky that no matter what decision you make, it has some kind of negative impact.. I think he came to a compromise partly for political reasons and partly for realistic reasons, OK ing the sending of another 30,000 troops to Afghanistan (where we are seen as invaders and not saviours) and at the same time setting a date for the beginning of the withdrawal of our troops. How do you face reality and satisfy all sides of a very complex problem that you inherited and would not have started if it were you in the first place?

I am still appalled when I read about the continuing fallout of the economic recession—the 10s of thousands of foreclosures on houses, businesses that went under, people whose life savings were wiped out instantly, etc. etc. etc. When I think of sin (a word that has fallen out of usage these days), I think that that is what is meant---to destroy hundreds of thousands of lives because of greed and selfishness. That is real sin. How it will be made up for I have no idea but I really would like to see some sort of retribution.

Here in South Africa many businesses have had to shut down, more than a millions jobs have been lost (the population is only about 50 million, or a bit less), and there was already a huge number of unemployed and unemployable people already before we were hit by this recession.

But, perhaps, the most challenging thing is the need for a new sense of morality and accountability, and plain old truthfulness and honesty in all our relations with each other. It is ironic that after pushing the church and believers to the sidelines, or seeing us as irrelevant, at the least, and an obstacle to human progress, at the most, that now government is asking for nuns and priests and brothers to come back and take over our education system. Ha! What a joke. What do you do when there is no more morality in society? The youth have no roots in anything solid and very few models and mentors. Now, even one of the icons, Tiger Woods, is found to be woefully lacking in simple honesty.

However, lets switch to something positive. I am encouraged by the many people who are trying their best, in bad circumstances, to bring some honesty into politics, like Obama; who volunteer to join the outreach to AIDS patients, many of whom have been rejected by their own families; who try to bring peace to their troubled areas, in spite of all the blockages and opposition they encounter; who seen their religion not only as not irrelevant, but rather as the underpinning for the energy and commitment they put into their lives of trying to live out the basic Christian challenge—love one another as I have loved you. They don't give up although they are often working against great odds. Even parents whose children have not accepted the basic morals of their parents. Perhaps your youth have become cynical because of the many sad reports of sexual abuse and hypocrisy of high ranking church people. I sometimes feel nervous when with children lest parents think "maybe he is one of them!"

However, putting all the negatives aside, I look forward, once again, the birth of the one who is called the Prince of Peace. In families, in church communities, in different sections of countries, between nations, between us an nature, if there is one thing that we all long for, it certainly is peace. But peace cannot be disconnected from Justice, Love, forgiveness, compassion, and a host of other basic human values. I think that it is a package deal, we work for all at the same time.

The meeting of the G20 regarding global warming promises not total agreement but at least, hopefully, a giant step forward in slowing down what has already shown itself to be a life threatening phenomenon. Cities are going under water, floods are becoming more frequent and more severe, hurricanes and tornadoes the same, and droughts lasting for three and more years have already snuffed out the lives of thousands of animals and has put their owners into starvation mode.

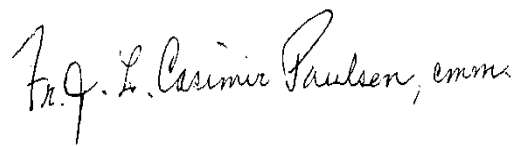
I have hope that the US will follow most of the other developed nations and put in place a health plan that is worthy of a great nation like our own. People in England and Canada, among others, look at us in disbelief, when we use the word "socialism". I can guarantee you that there is not the most conservative person in England, including the Iron Lady, Mrs. Thatcher, who would dream of touching the National Health Service. What is the matter with us.

Here in South Africa, I would never have voted for Zuma, the present president, but I am having to change my opinion. He has been doing really good things for ordinary people.

Here at Landsend Parish, where everything seems dead, I am ready to face the challenge of trying to resuscitate what seems to be a corpse. I can't figure out why it is this way. On the other hand, Bedford Parish (St. Anthony) is thriving, and our drive to make a justice and peace commission a reality is moving forward. The youth are marvellous and full of energy, even though jobs are scarce or non-existent. They just don't give up.

So, again, for all of you, my beloved family (friends are adopted members of the family), I wish you a year of hopes and dreams, big and small, and even tiny, come true. Be open to the spirit of Christmas, fresh hope, new life, especially in the spirit. I now have a companion, a new, young priest, and I admire him for adapting so well to the idiosyncrasies of an old (er) man. It has been a delight to work with him. I hope that I am giving him a good example.

May you all be richly blessed at Christmas and in the coming year. Blessings sometimes come in disguises. As always, Love and Peace to you all. , Fr. Cas.



PS. I had to change the font size to make everything fit on the page. I hope that your eyes can still read the small print!!

PPS. I haven't had the time to check through what I have said and correct things or make changes. It is just going out as it is. I almost had it finished early this morning, by 7am. But it has been one interruption after the other and it is now almost 3:30 in the afternoon and I still have other commitments so it is now or never (or toooo late!)