

25<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Bon dimanche!

Apologies for not writing yesterday - I became engrossed in sorting and packing music, CDs and family photos...

The intended date of our move is coming closer. And so our thoughts go to the practicalities of our departure.

You can imagine that we have been following with some trepidation but also not just a little amusement the muscle-flexing exercises between the UK and France surrounding the quarantine restrictions.

I am reminded of my dear reception year class that I was teaching a couple of years back. The most common conversation I had with them was about whose side of the desk "that one" was and whether Matteo was allowed to put his foot so close to Fantine's chair.....

As we seem to approach a stand-off between our neighbouring countries, the realities of boundaries and borders creep into my consciousness again.

You may have wondered before why the subject lines say "view from France" and then I mention Geneva all the time. You may have dismissed that thinking that continental geography teaching could have been better (and it certainly could have been in my case...). Our everyday reality is though that we live on and across the border between France and Switzerland - quite literally in many cases as the border between France and Switzerland is less than ill-defined in many places.

Our house is in the French commune of Ambilly but my work (and Sally's former school) are in Switzerland. Even during lockdown, I was allowed in and out of the two countries without too much of a fuss thanks to a French "attestation" and my Swiss work permit. It has been different for people without any "valid" reason to cross. This had the interesting side-effect that the Swiss border force had to rapidly employ a surplus of border guards and the military was moved in to guard those places that are actually not recognisable as border crossings - for example bridges over small streams or the woodland path which inevitably leads from Switzerland to France and back without anybody noticing. Well, at least the Swiss military finally got to see some "action".

Borders, boundaries, this is mine / this is yours, I am here / you are there...

How appropriate is today's Gospel reading! When I read it out during our morning zoom service, I almost got lost between the I and You and mine and yours. It felt confusing - but, I guess, this is exactly the effect that it should have: "con-fusion", the mingling together in Latin.

What is Christ's is the Father's and what is the Father's is Christ's - there is no mine and yours, just oneness.

When I reflected yesterday on what I might write to you - to my great surprise a hymn popped up in my mind: "Onward Christian soldiers". That one hymn that I refuse to sing usually on account of the rather violent and exclusive language. Well, maybe the Holy Spirit had other plans (or a day off....), in any case, I thought I encourage us all as Christ's "foot soldiers" to push at our boundaries and borders and to call out for greater inclusiveness.

To come back to the UK and France - maybe what we need is less closed borders and more common agreement over the way we are going to protect vulnerable people as best as possible? I strongly believe that we as the Church, together with all people of faith, have interesting insights and that we need to make our prophetic voice heard. If that takes a bit of verbal "soldiering", well, then let's go for it! (Another thing you might learn about me here is that I have got a "red" heart..... :o )

I wonder whether my recent viewing of Les Misérables might have anything to do with a sudden spike of revolutionary feelings.....

Best go back to sorting and packing.

And to round off my little tour of messages, here is the solution to the puzzle from View from France 1:

Tilou is, of course, our dog.

Gilbert and Gordon are guinea-pigs.

Henrietta, Snow-White, Maisy, Coco and Jimjams are as you know, chickens. By the way, Maisy is absolutely fine.

And Fluffy, Brownie, Star, Happy, Harriet, Husky, Clover, Hope, and Suumu are our rabbits.

I attach a couple of photos.

The chickens are going to stay here, but you should be able to come and visit the others in due course.

Many, many thanks for your many kind messages and the warm welcome you have given me.

I have enjoyed writing to you (and I hope it hasn't be too painful for you). Tom has my greatest admiration for coming up every day at the same time with interesting things to say!

With all blessings and warm regards,

Julia

And, concerning borders and boundaries, a self-reflective joke from France:



"Lifting of lockdown restrictions à la French"