

Pater Yves LaFontaine CMM aus Mariannahill, Südafrika

December 26 2018

Dear friends,

It would be attempting the impossible to make you believe that I am freezing here. The truth is that the temperature goes from 15/19 to 30/39-40 – plus the temperature-humidity index – according to the day or the hour of the day. We are almost there, at the heart of summer! And no need to say that I need my ventilator, even at night. Moreover, I take my energizing drink daily, a prescription from my doctor. Apart from that and the fact that I must rest much – I am often “caput” -, life is beautiful!

I think of you often since my home leave to Quebec is coming very quickly. My “triumphant” arrival” !!!??? Ah, ah! – will be around April 25/27 2019.

I do what I can considering the limitations of the “little old man” and “greenhorn” that I am with my 75 years of age. I even try to do it with enthusiasm, which however I must re-dynamize each day.

Unfortunately, the process of beatification of Abbot Francis stagnates since too long. One of the main reasons is that my productivity is so low during the whole summer that once the season is over, I have to make up for the time lost during that long period.

I will soon end my teaching to our novices. There are still only four instructions. My last one will be next January 18. I wanted to stop in 2018, but after the heartfelt and “reasonable” pleas of the novice master, I gave up. However, I made him accept to find somebody else for 2019. One day I will no longer be here and he will have to find somebody else by all means. I don't belong to those who think they are irreplaceable. It's better to start right now to tackle the issue of finding a successor as soon as possible than to improvise at the last minute. But I must say that the temptation to “hope against all hope” is strong, which obliged me to show determination. We have ten novices at the moment. Unfortunately, I will be letting behind me what, deep down, gives me great satisfaction: to teach to young adults. Early in the year 2018 I had refused to teach also to our postulants.

I celebrated the Christmas mass at our CPS Convent at 7:30 pm on the 24th. I then joined my confreres later in the night for a short festive moment with them. Went to bed at around 23:30 pm. The morning mass was at 7:00 am. Tonight we have our traditional BBQ (braai) inside the cloister. These days I hope to be able to find somebody to replace me at the CPS Convent for

a few days. It won't be easy, but I will try. I would like to go and spend a few days at Mthatha where at this time is one of our theology students, one of my spiritual sons. I would take advantage of the trip to see him, but mainly to switch off for a short while. A very short break! Don't laugh now please. Don't forget that I also work on every Saturday and Sunday that the Good Lord brings (at least a few hours).

Before ending, a few news concerning my adoption country, South Africa. The mood is rather pessimistic. Our economy has slowed down, there are so many children still out of school and we suffer from massive unemployment. In our Natal province the rate of people killed in road traffic has increased by 16% since last year. Besides, and this is horrible, a total of 2.09 million crimes (a variety of 17 different types) was recorded in 2018. Good news, however, the rate has gone down by 4,4% since last year! Now, to that one must add the allegations of "state capture," which have combined to form a dark cloud that overshadows the promise of 1994 and puts in the shade a country which, on the other hand – and you know it -, is characterized by a great beauty. Yes, these problems are too real unfortunately. Corruption is omnipresent...and very, very heavy. A week ago, I confessed a lady who works for the government and she cried bitterly until the end of her confession on account of what she witnesses daily right in front of her. That makes you cry indeed. Millions of Rands, and more, are swept under the carpet. Finally, let me just mention by the way the killing of members of the same political party. If you want to make money, come here and be a lawyer.

This said, one must not, by all means, loose sight – it is so easy! – that a lot has also gone right, that life is much better than it was in 1994. To give but one example, in fact, the number of South Africans with a job has doubled from nearly 8 million to just over of 16 million today. A second example if you wish, the number of families cooking with electricity (an excellent indicator of living standards) has increased from just over 4 million in 1996 to just under 14 million today – or from less than 50% to more than 80%. And the number of families with access to clean water has doubled.

Finally, since we have a new president – who must navigate very prudently if he doesn't want to break his neck – there are many inquiry commissions that work at cleaning things up within the government itself and in all the state entities. They are far from idle. But the process is long, painful and we don't see yet the results, that is, the serial sentences and incarcerations. They are slowly coming up however. I am still hopeful therefore.

Let me close now. I wish to each and every one of you a Christmas season filled with peace and rich in beautiful surprises. A Christmas of great hope! Quoting Saint Paul, I wish for you "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable." (Phil 4:7-8). We need that, more than ever, for when we probe the world of ours, and our Church too, grappling with its scandals, it is so easy to lose hope. We must be far-sighted. Did not our Church prove, beyond her worse periods, that Christ is stronger than his poor institution, which will always be indigent and inadequate because she is made of men and women of flesh and blood, marked by the original sin – which must not

become a justification however.

I leave you now for I need right now a good cup of coffee.

Fr. Yves