

Letter from the Pyrenees

Dear Parishioners,

I have moved on from my summer base at the *Monastère de St.-Benoît* in Provence and have just spent a few days in the ancient *Abbaye Sainte-Marie* in the Pyrenean foothills. The monastery dates at least to 779 when Charlemagne granted it territory and status. Now the Augustinian *Canons Regular of the Mother of God* are filling its ancient stone halls with the strains of Gregorian chant.

Imagine my first morning here as I sat down with the other guests for a simple breakfast of coffee and bread, looking forward to a few days of rest. I introduced myself as a priest from America with two little but faithful communities of souls, thinking it was an interesting enough introduction.

Then one of the other guests at table threw down a hand I couldn't beat. His name is Brother Elias and he is a Palestinian Greek Orthodox monk. Last summer he was kidnapped by Muslims in Gaza and held captive for 6 weeks in an underground dungeon. He had been too open in his love for Jesus in the streets and was summarily apprehended. He was beaten, abused and even hung upside down in various efforts to break him. When the critical moment came, he was brought out into the desert by 7 commandos, and given the choice to convert or die. He chose Christ and eternal life and began to chant a hymn in Aramaic, readying himself for the inevitable. Then quite unexpectedly there was a brilliant intensification of the light around them. His executioners in great fear exclaimed, "*Who is that Man standing beside you?!*" And they fled, leaving him to live and tell the tale. Brother Elias is confident that Jesus miraculously appeared and saved his life. If you met him you would believe his story. He was the joy of the monastery, with a gentle smiling face still radiant from the experience. He practically clicks his heels as he goes about the place! That's how my day started!



Brother Elias, rewarded for his fidelity to Jesus and miraculously delivered from execution in Gaza.

Let me turn a sour note now for the sake of literary contrast. The next day one of the monks handed me some texts to read (and apparently give me anxiety while on retreat). The French "Minister of Education" (scary title) under Socialist President Hollande wrote this in 2007:

"The entire project of the faith of secularism consists in changing the very nature of religion, of God, of Christ, and of definitively putting down the Church."

He continued a year later adding:

"The French Revolution is the eruption in time of something that does not pertain to time, for it is an absolute beginning, it is the presence and the incarnation of a sense, of a regeneration and of an expiation of the French people. Seventeen Eighty-Nine, the Year without parallel, engendered through a sudden leap in history, a 'New Man.' The Revolution is a meta-historical event; that is to say, a religious event. The Revolution implies the total forgetting of that which preceded the Revolution. And therefore school [viz., the French school system] has a fundamental role, since school must strip the child of any pre-republican attachments so as to elevate him or her to the status of 'citizen.' It is very much a new birth, a transubstantiation which works within the school and for the school: a new church with its new clergy, its new liturgy, its new tablets of the Law."

This is very creepy stuff. But it's how the international Left thinks. The progeny of 1789 just seem to do so with a certain acidic *panache*. The traditions of the past, especially those of the Church, must be eradicated (so it is quite an irony that in France of all countries the traditional Mass is so immensely strong and growing). There is even a French neologism for this attack on the past: "*memoricide*," or the effacing of historical memory (think of Orwell's "1984"). Does this sound familiar? But you would be proud of the precision thinking of the Catholic intelligentsia that is leveling its well calibrated response at the soft underbellies of the dragons of disorder in volume after volume of excellent writings all over France.



An example of the Catholic counter response to the "Spirit of 1789"

The stories twist and turn. The same day that I heard and read these convoluted things, I learned of an interesting encounter had by one of the priests of the monastery. He was alone in the train station at Toulouse recently when he was unexpectedly and verbally accosted by a miscellaneous anti-clerical progressive barbarian (no doubt “educated” according to the “new religion” of Revolutionary France.) As this uncivilized spectacle unfolded, of all the folks gawking in the train station, a *Muslim* man came forward and quite intimidatingly told the cultured savage in no uncertain terms *not to speak to a priest in such a disrespectful manner*, and furthermore to leave immediately (like with your hands up in the air and walking slowly backwards).

This data was all downloaded into my brain in the space of 36 hours. So my head is spinning: full of topsy-turvy tales of Muslims doing intense and unexpected things; of Frenchmen alternately smiling, snubbing, singing, stabbing and some snoring; of haunted historical havens honed in on by holy hoodies; and of malodorous, moldy French cheeses which if eaten too late at night induce dreams of revolutionary sheep with black berets grazing in fields of waving bottles of rosé in mountain groves near the Spanish border and chanting in Latin.

--Father de Rosa



Lourdes, the Marian jewel in the Crown of France

P.S. I wrote all that a few days ago, so forgive me for the drama. I have made my escape from that weird dimensional warp and am now safe in Lourdes. For the past two days I've been going to the Holy Grotto. The weather is sunny and warm and the village is full of pilgrims. It is a quite moving to see the children of Mary coming in humble hope to her shrine. There is no place quite like Lourdes. In a few hours I will be going off to the grand candlelight Procession. I have with me those two large manila envelopes with your many intentions therein, as well as all the messages you've recently sent me by email. I will be praying on each of them individually as the days go by. Peace to you.



Candles burning at Lourdes in symbolic representation of our prayers going up to Heaven