



Dear Friends,

« Crăciun fericit ! » - in Romanian: «Merry Christmas»! My letter will certainly arrived after December 25 but I think that the light of the Nativity is still shining brightly, a light that many countries and many people need so much! I hope that you were able to celebrate the birth of the Christ-child as it was meant to be, this event whose deepest meaning is ever relevant, as the Fathers of the Eastern Church state so clearly: «God became man so that man could become God.» An inspiring point of view --- a challenge for all of us!

I had a very busy summer. July I was in Romania, helping out in the parish but also spending time for language immersion in an orphanage run by our Oblate Sisters of the Assumption. In August, it was back to French, some R&R.... and then I attended the Dombes Group (an unofficial gathering of 20 Roman Catholic and 20 Protestant theologians that has met regularly since 1937 in a small monastery near Lyon, France).

The situation in Romania this past year, especially this past summer, has been a real trial: the new parliamentary majority engaged in a series of maneuvers to force the President out and avoid "cohabitation" (power-sharing), which appeared to place the rule of law in jeopardy, Fortunately, the worst did not prevail and Europe stepped in and ensured good government. Still, there remains the bitter taste of a political class that, however you look at it, is taking its time to mature into a real democracy.

Something new probably caught your eye as soon as you saw the photo of the community! There have been some significant changes. In the fall Fr. Ovidiu left for our house in Margeneni (in the northeast part of the country) and Fathers Jean-Marie and Fr. Ionel arrived. So, those

who remain from the founding fathers are our superior, Fr. Lucian (1st on the left) and yours truly (far right)! Jean-Marie came to us from the Democratic Republic of the Congo after more than a year of red tape in obtaining a visa; a theologian, taken up with ecumenism, he immersed himself from the start in learning Romanian and in Orthodox theology. With his presence, the community has gained a greater international color...which can only help a Romanian society that is fairly insensitive to the charms of difference... As for Ionel, he came to us from Blaj, a community of the Byzantine rite in the western part of the country that, unfortunately, had to close. Experienced in youth ministry, he has taken responsibility for our ecumenical residence for young people as well as for the overall house management; besides, he brings with him his extensive experience of the Eastern tradition, having served so many years in the Greek Catholic Church. All in all, a very pleasant community that is equally effective in its mission!

As far as I am concerned during this second full year, I found myself at a good cruising speed with regard to my two principal responsibilities (and it certainly wasn't boring, because there are always surprises in the East)! Our St. Peter-St. Andrew Center is now known and recognized both because of its library (overseen by Fr. Lucian, with Sr. Maria, and some Assumption volunteers who have come from France for a couple of months) and because of the talks and discussions. My last letter announced the arrival of thousands of books that we inherited from Professor Petre Nasturel, who died at the beginning of 2012; we just organized a day of homage for him, attended by the leading figures of Byzantine studies in Romania. As for our evenings of reflection and dialogue, they continue to draw a large public, in part a group of faithful attendees (our Rolodex has 500 names at present) and, in part, newcomers. We have carried on our efforts at finding partners --- such as different faculties of theology (Orthodox and Catholic, but also Pentecostal), as well that of Byzantine musicology. This spring we have foreseen a seminar on the Christians of the East to be presented by a Belgian professor, a friend of our communities, who gives class to some of our student residents. Sometimes the Orthodox here think that they have a corner on the market of Eastern Christianity; it's good to broaden their horizons to include other Churches....Coptic, Armenian, Syrian, etc...

As for the French-speaking parish of Sacred Heart, I have been investing a lot of time and energy. In addition to the regular slate of activities, I am taking advantage of this Year of the Faith to launch a series of initiatives: some special spiritual exercises and a monthly set of catecheses for adults; about 20 people attend regularly, not excluding some Orthodox who receive little faith formation in their own Church. I'm also responsible for children and young people, quite numerous in this community of ex-pats: 30 children just getting started, 40 in the later years, and 60 in the youth ministry program for which I have organized a Sunday evening Mass that is packed. It's really a community alive --- with beautiful liturgies and a striking outreach to the poor. To see what we're up to go to our site (<http://bucarest.paroisse.net>).

So that I might not get bored, I accepted to give a series of classes (6 sessions of 4 hours each) at the Catholic faculty here in Bucharest: not in fundamental theology ...but in journalism! It seems a little strange to me to be teaching something that I practiced for 20 years in France. I am happy to share my convictions and what I have learned professionally to help the local church familiarize itself with the world of the media. What is at stake here in Romanian society, as elsewhere, is the proclamation of the gospel where secularization is occurring at a fast pace.

In earlier letters I spoke a lot of my third "hat," that of serving as "the delegate of the Provincial of France for the Near Eastern." I am not going to spend a lot of time this time on this responsibility; however, there were a few highlights I'd like to mention. On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Assumptionist presence in the Near East, we received letters both from Pope Benedict and the patriarch of Constantinople; we had some wonderful celebrations to mark this occasion, including a special celebration at Notre Dame in Paris on December 16 (go to the site of KTO for video coverage) and a papal audience at the beginning of December, 150 years after one with Pius IX.

All the best in 2013 to you!

Fr. Michel Kubler, A.A.

Bucharest, December 2012

Saint Peter-St. Andrew Center