**Our Mad Life 53**

More Lock**out** than **Lockdown**

Thank you all those who have been enquiring recently about my whereabouts. I am still in the UK. Soon after I arrived in the UK Madagascar had a series of lockdowns in various areas and the strict lockdown in the capital has just been lifted. The international airport has also been closed with just one Air France flight per week which arrives in Madagascar without any passengers and evacuates foreign nationals and diplomats. Ports are also closed to anyone entering the country, so for the time being nobody is allowed in.

One of the joys of being in England is getting to know our grandchildren. Our local 6 year old granddaughter is quite frequently with us after school. As soon as she arrives it is time to play: she is the school teacher while Sarah and I are the students. She clearly has a good teacher as the affirmative comments pour out as she inspects our work before any criticism is made. When she has had enough she calls, “Pause”, and we are back in charge. To begin with being here felt as if our world had called “Pause”. It took a while to come to terms with the fact that this is history taking a dramatic turn and life is full of ongoing surprising changes which are neither “the new normal” nor provisional.

I am in constant contact with the archdeacon in Mahajanga and less frequently with many others. People ask me if I am using Zoom. Nobody in the diocese has an internet connection so that is not possible. However I am belatedly learning to communicate via FaceBook. Not being IT literate I don’t understand why that works when the internet doesn’t! My sessions on WhatsApp, etc frequently come to an abrupt stop when the power and or the connection fails.

The good news is that, at last, the President has agreed to the importation of the coronavirus vaccine. All the people who are corresponding with me are nervous about having the vaccine as they have heard that it comes from India or is unwanted in the USA. Sadly our new bishop of Toliara, Bishop Samitiana, has been very ill with covid-19 but I hear that he is improving. He asked me to help prepare, via WhatsApp, the Rev Gaston Tsiavandeza, one of his deacons for ordination to the priesthood, in particular to discuss with him Baptism and Holy Communion. Gaston is in the midst of the famine area and in his parish there have been over 1,000 baptisms this year, mostly adults. This deacon has actually participated in more baptisms in his short ministry that I have in my life long ministry! We have had some very interesting conversations about what is essential in life, about the powerful symbolism of water in a place where the drought has lasted 4 years, about the symbolism of eating at Holy Communion where people have died of starvation. It challenges us to reconsider how essential our spiritual nourishment is: the food and drink that sustains us on our pilgrimage to eternal life.

In Mahajanga diocese the building of St Andrew’s church continues and currently I am in correspondence with the chairman of our Youth Organisation about the diocesan Youth Rally to be held in August. They have optimistically booked me to speak at that. Also they have optimistically asked for a grant towards travel and food for the delegates. It is to be held in the northern end of the diocese. Like everything else it would be so much easier to organise if I was in Mahajanga. Similarly the MU is preparing for their annual diocesan meeting which they hope to have in Maevatanana, reputedly the hottest town in Madagascar, south east of Mahajanga.

It all seems very strange sitting at my desk, overfed and comfortable, dealing directly with people in the midst of such distress. I certainly am very conscious of all our blessings.

Thank you for your prayers and support throughout this prolonged time of uncertainty.

Yours

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