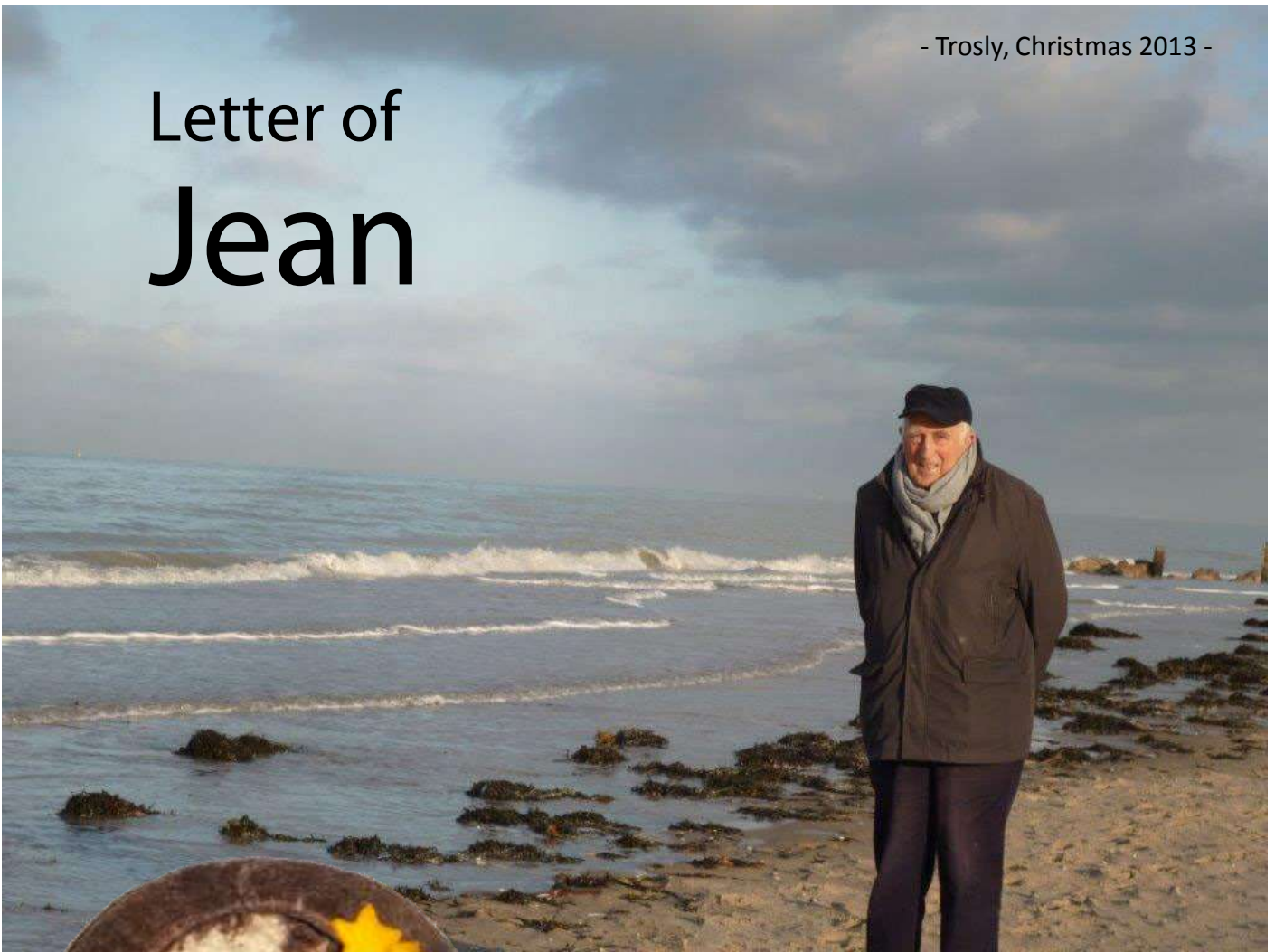


Letter of Jean



Crib made by
L'Arche workshop at Bethlehem: Ma'an Lil-Hayat



My dear friends,

Here is the letter which I wrote, at the request of the Catholic newspaper *La Croix* (The Cross), to Christian friends of the Middle East. Here in France we live Christmas in peace, but there are so many who are living Christmas in war and suffering. I send you this letter so that we can pray together for them and for each other.

My dear Christian friends of the Middle East,

I write to you from my community of L'Arche where I have lived for almost 50 years with people with intellectual disabilities. I know many of you thanks to my various journeys to the Middle East, when I visited your communities of Faith & Light and L'Arche there. Now many of you are living in precarious situations, dangerous ones, amid persecution, war and injustice.

Christmas is coming. Christmas is a time of gentle peace, and yet which recalls a terrible time of war, when Herod assassinated all the children under two years old around Bethlehem – what horror! The cries of those children, the screams of their mothers and the impotent rage of their fathers! Joseph and Mary fled with their infant to escape this persecution. Today many of you are like the Holy Family, refugees living in tents.

Today I feel uneasy to be far away from you, but I am united with you in the body of Christ. We are together; my prayer and that of your many friends is that you be enveloped in peace. Fear so quickly destroys us. Jesus often exhorted his disciples, saying «Be not afraid, do not fear little ones, because it has pleased your Father to give you His Kingdom» Jesus wants to say to each one «Have faith, know that you are beloved, and that I am with you».

Many of you live in the land of Jesus. This land was evangelized by Jesus himself and by his disciples. You are each so important to God and Jesus is with you; He is not there to take away your suffering, but he is there to give you the strength to bear the suffering.

We are with you in our hearts and spirits. St Paul says that in the Body which is the Church the weakest are the most indispensable; they make present Jesus crucified. Yes, the Christians of the Middle East are crucified. Mary is present with Jesus crucified, and she is present with you; may she bring you peace and tenderness.

Make sure to tell your neighbours, Muslim men and women who praise and honor the God of peace, and who have been wounded by those who debase the Holy name of God by their violence, that we pray with them and for them. We also pray for those who have been caught up in the world of violence; that they may refind the true God of peace.

The God of us all desires peace, so that we can come together with open and loving hearts, as the beloved children of God.

May the God of peace bless you all !



Al-Fulk
L'Arche in Egypte



Ma'an Lil-Hayat
L'Arche at Bethlehem



Al-Safina
L'Arche at Damas

At the moment (December 15th) I am giving a retreat at the Farm of Trosly for 45 men and women from the streets who now live in community with volunteers in some 15 apartments in Paris.

These are marvellous and astonishing communities, full of life as well as of the unexpected, as the people who are welcomed there each bring their own life story their gift and suffering. Some came to the farm to prepare their hearts for Christmas, to pray and to wash each others' feet as Jesus did. As these retreatants are street people they preferred that the sessions be in the form of sharings. They know how to share their anguish and their fears and also how to share the difficulties which they encounter living in community. This group comes twice a year to the Farm; some of them had already been here, for others this is their first time. Its a joy for me to be able to speak of Jesus who came to tell each of us «you are important and precious, more beautiful than you dare believe». When we are all gathered together as one in prayer and living the Word of God, its a little like the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of Love.



Jean with a woman attending the retreat

My joy, these past months, has been to give retreats at the Farm, and sometimes to give sessions for L'Arche members. In the end, I always talk about the same reality: we are transformed by our encounters with vulnerable people who are crying out for friendship. The vision of our societies is to push each one to excel, to go higher, to have more and more material goods, power and fame, separating ourselves from the weakest. However, it is always those who are most fragile who are the closest to their humanity, their suffering and their need to be loved. It is they who show the rest of us the way to live in truth and in love.

You won't believe it, but several weeks ago I returned to Berck... to walk on the beaches, admire the birds, breathe the wonderful sea air and pray with the Little Sisters of Jesus who welcomed Odile and me for 3 days. Holidays are great for us !



Little Sisters of Jesus
at Berck

God continues to send prophets, like Nelson Mandela – 28 years in prison and many years of forced labour in the salt mines.

How terrible! Yet, what a vision of peace, of freedom and of forgiveness! Yes, he gives hope to humanity at war or fleeing into comfort. Let us pray that each one of us be enabled to follow Mandela's example along this path of peace and reconciliation, and that God continue to send other men and women like him, and like Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma.



Nelson Mandela



In a few days I, with Patrick, Andrew and others from my home, will go from house to house in our village to sing Christmas carols «Glory to God in the highest Heaven and peace to those who He loves».

Yes, glory to God for the beauty of creation, the beauty of children and of so many marvellous people who struggle for peace. God, through the prophet Ezekiel, announced «I will change your heart of stone and will give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit within you». So often fear closes us in upon ourselves. However, those fears can be transformed by trust. May our hearts be opened to Love, to peace and to trust !



May the God of peace be born within each of us !

Jean



PS: In order to facilitate the distribution of this letter, please send us your email address if you have not already done so.